Luisa Conti, Fergal Lenehan (eds.)

LIFEWIDE LEARNING IN POSTDIGITAL SOCIETIES

Shedding Light on Emerging Culturalities

[transcript] Studies in Digital Interculturality

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Editorial

As cultural boundaries blur and virtual and physical spaces merge, interculturality and digitalization mould our everyday world. We believe these entangled concepts should be viewed together. Our interdisciplinary book series is dedicated to the idea of a scholarly Intercultural Communication, informed by the perspectives of critical Digital and Internet Studies: **Studies in Digital Interculturality**. In this series we wish to publish thematically relevant monographs, anthologies, dissertations, and edited volumes of the highest quality.
The series is edited by Luisa Conti, Fergal Lenehan, Roman Lietz and Milene Mendes de Oliveira.

Luisa Conti (PD Dr.) is a researcher at Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, Germany, as well as P.I. in the EU-project "KIDS4ALLL: Key Inclusive Development Strategies for Lifelong Learning" and "ReDICo: Researching Digital Interculturality Co-operatively". The chief pillars of her interdisciplinary research are education, communication and cultural studies. Her focus is on the factors and dynamics which foster or hinder social cohesion, with digitality being therefore a central aspect of her field of research.
Fergal Lenehan (PD Dr.) is P.I. and researcher at the research co-operative "ReDICo: Researching Digital Intercultuality Co-operatively". He has written extensively on the intellectual history of the European idea, Irish-German relations and histories and theories of the Internet. His research focuses on theoretical linkages between postdigitality, intercultural communication and cosmopolitanism.

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This volume has been written within the framework of the project ReDICo: Researching Digital Interculturality Co-operatively, which connects the universities of Jena, Potsdam and Mainz.

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Dedicated to Jürgen Bolten

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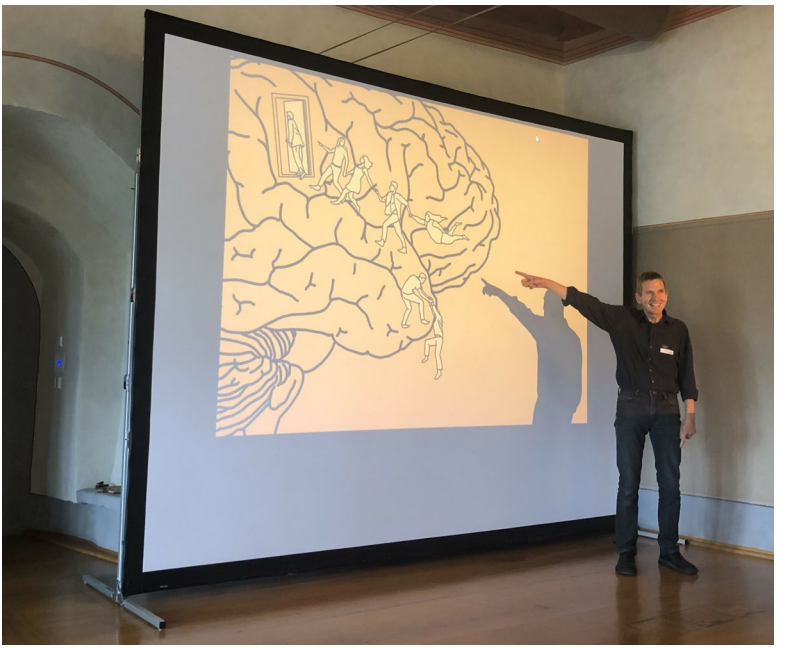

First and foremost, we extend our deepest and most heartfelt appreciation to Jürgen Bolten; a visionary whose exceptional teaching, dialogic spirit, and innovative thinking have not only enriched our own lives, but have left an indelible mark on the thousands of students, scientists, and practitioners fortunate enough to cross his path.

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Throughout ReDICo's inaugural E-Co-Conference from 29 June to 1 July 2022, which served as the crucible for the concept of this book, we had the privilege of celebrating three remarkable decades of his department's existence. Jürgen's open-minded approach has been nothing short of transformative, igniting inspiration in us all. His work, which fearlessly navigates the complexities of our intricate reality and revels in the art of embracing ambiguity, has opened up fresh vistas of understanding. With this book, we aspire to share a glimpse of his profound contributions on an international stage, as his influence, though substantial within the German discourse, deserves broader recognition. Jürgen died after a relatively short illness in March 2023.

We are deeply indebted to the artist Akemi Paz for her boundless creativity. Her artistic work breathed new life into conference discussions, has imbued our series on "Studies in Digital Interculturality" with a unique ReDICo character, and helped envision the content of this book: Learning unfolds continuously in our postdigital society, as we engage individually yet interdependently with the Internet's intricate web.

Our sincere appreciation goes out to all the authors and contributors who participated in the conference, actively engaging in dynamic discussions during the digital, hybrid, and analogue sessions. Special commendation is reserved for those whose work has found a home in this inaugural volume of the "Studies in Digital Interculturality" series. The prompt responses and dedication to refining the chapters have been pivotal in our collective endeavor.

We would also like to recognize our esteemed ReDICo colleagues, dedicated peer reviewers, and consultants who provided invaluable guidance throughout the process: Milene Mendes de Oliveira from the University of Potsdam and Roman Lietz from the University of Mainz. Additionally, we extend our gratitude to the scientific assistants who are integral members of the Jena ReDICo team, with a special mention of Carmen Pereyra, for their unwavering support.

Last but certainly not least, we wish to express our gratitude to the BMBF (German Federal Ministry of Education and Research) for their generous funding, which has made the realization of this entire project possible. Their commitment to advancing the field of "Intercultural Communication" on both strategic and scientific fronts is laudable and essential for our collective growth and development.

This book stands as a testament to the collaborative spirit and dedication of all those mentioned above. It is through your contributions, support, and

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steadfast enthusiasm that we have been able to embark on this transformative journey into the realm of digital interculturality.

Thanks to the publisher transcript for their receptiveness to our proposal. We are excited to commence a potentially enduring series of captivating and innovative interdisciplinary perspectives. This endeavor will continue to enrich the discourse on digital interculturality and foster meaningful collaborations among scholars, practitioners, and learners worldwide.

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Introduction

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Of Wineapples and Acorns

Nuala O'Connor

I follow Calista because of the photograph of a pomegranate tree that she tweets. I zoom in, realising I haven't known how or where the fruit grow. The pomegranates are blushed and golden on the branches, topped with tiny crowns.

'Wineapples,' I whisper to the screen.

I'm brought back to myself as a child, peering at strange fruit on a cart outside my Dublin school. The fruit-seller calls them wineapples and splits one open, seducing me with the seed-rubies that belch from its heart. Sharp and gritty in my mouth, I love the seeds' alien nature, and the heft of the sundered carapace in my hands. This is exotica; this is beauty; this is the elsewhere I crave.

'Gorgeous', I respond to Calista's tweeted photo.

She replies instantly. 'This tree grows beside my house.' And I imagine a place of whitewashed walls and a blue door, the sea beyond. 'Show me an Irish tree!' she types.

I take my mobile phone, run to the balcony, and snap the crenulated, just-starting-to-turn leaves of my only potted plant.

'Oak,' I tell Calista.

'Very nice. And the fruits, what do you call them?'

'Acorns!' I reply. 'They're not for eating ☺'

'Yes. We call them βελανίδια,' she types, and I hop to Google Translate, listen, and say, 'Velanídia.'

We talk about the pomegranate's calyx and the acorn's cupule, how pretty they are, how perfect and essential. We talk about Greek sunshine and Irish drizzle. We move to DMs and Calista tells me she has fallen out of love with her husband. I tell her I have been single for two years and eight months, and that my father has dementia. She says she loves Greece, but she needs to find freshness, locate peace. I say I dislike the western city I'm in and its eternal, energetic clamour.

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I sit on my bed at late hours, crack open my laptop like the cleaving of a pomegranate. The screen, in my midnight room, is my mirror and portal, its silver-light my connection. I scroll and tab, flit from platform to platform, from encyclopaedia to document. My last stop, always, is Twitter, to see if Calista is there. She has not posted in three hours. She has not posted in twenty-one hours. Has she gone?

The city without hums and hurries, screeches, slows, and re-starts. I sleep. I turn over and my eyes flick open. The red light of my phone, charging by my head, is bright as a ruby. I lift my mobile and go straight to Twitter. The numeral 1 hovers over the message icon and I quicken as I tap on it. Calista. She tells me she is flying to Ireland. She tells me that my oak needs solid ground, a rooting place, and that I do too.

'I am open to you,' she says.

I send her back words from a poem: 'The end cracks open with the beginning: rosy, tender, glittering within the fissure.'

'I knew you would understand,' Calista types back.

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From Interculturality to Culturality

The Bridging Function of Postdigital Lifewide Learning

Luisa Conti

On 1 July 2022 in the scenic Dornburg Castles near Jena, Jürgen Bolten, keynote speaker at ReDICo's first E-Co-Conference, surprised the participants with a spontaneous and profound preamble to his presentation addressing critical global challenges.

Today, he told us, we have reached a historic turning point, a "Zeitenwende", marking a broader sea change. The once dominant inclination towards openness – seen since the 1990s and exemplified by the dismantling of European Union borders, the proliferation of free online services that have transformed the Internet into a dynamic Web 2.0, and the rise of emancipatory movements across the globe – has been pivoting towards a wider closure for over a decade. This turn towards a closing of society clashes today violently against the imperative of responding, in a sustainable and coordinated manner, to the challenges set by our complex, dynamic, and globalized reality.

On that day Jürgen Bolten criticized, in particular, the lack of prioritization of the ecological crisis, the ignoring of its irrevocable consequences, and this despite the recent experience during the COVID-19 pandemic, which means that we do know how considerable and rapid changes can very quickly dismantle and reconstitute our lifeworlds in new and different ways.

The pressing question Jürgen Bolten raised, in what would become his final public speech before his unexpected death, was how we, as a society, intend to confront and navigate this existential quandary. What resources and strategies do we require to surmount these challenges?

He called on us to embark on a journey of introspection and conscious societal transformation, in the advocacy of a holistic perspective, rather than isolated individuals seeking self-preservation, disconnected from any sense of collectivity. The message was clear: Our times need individuals who are willing and able to engage with uncertainty, by sharing expertise and resources

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towards the development of innovative responses which guarantee a good life for all beings on Earth.

Precisely this ability to understand uncertainty not as a menace but as a challenge and to cope with it in a constructive manner, while creating new (fragile) normalities, is what Jürgen Bolten, in his extensive published work, has defined as intercultural competence. In this framework, interculturality denotes the encounter with the unfamiliar, while culturality represents the fabric of easily decipherable "familiar multiplicity" (Bolten, 2015, p. 118). Culturality emerges as individuals engage in habitual interactions within diverse contexts, thereby shaping their personal yet interconnected lifeworld over time. These interactions occur across various "fields of action" (Bolten, 2015, p. 40), contributing to the formation of a person's multifaceted cultural identity. In contrast, interculturality signifies encounters with the unfamiliar, which can occur not only in unfamiliar contexts but increasingly within familiar contexts, due to the intensifying dynamics of change. What is initially unfamiliar can evolve into being familiar; interculturality transforms into culturality, while expanding the "horizon" (Schütz & Luckmann, 2003, p. 48) of one's own lifeworld (Bolten, 2015, p. 117). Interculturality can, therefore, be understood as a transformative transition, enabling the assimilation of the new into the known, coupled with the simultaneous transformation of the self.

As summarized by Martin Buber's I-Thou formulation (Buber, 1996), our identity is a product of the encounters we undergo. Therefore, what people know, do (including thinking, perceiving, and de/coding), and feel are contingent upon what they have learned until that moment in the different fields of action they have spent their time in. While traditional cultural knowledge acquisition was grounded in immediate surroundings, the denizens of postdigital societies now have access to an almost boundless array of fields of action. The Internet has considerably expanded the realm of cultural learning, forming the foundation for a cultural hybrid digital space accessible at the click of a button. Consequently, interculturality becomes an *ubiquitous* experience of unfamiliarity, and learning becomes not just lifelong but *lifewide*: We are permanently and throughout our heterogeneous lifeworld confronted with newness which we need to 'learn' to understand.

The concept of intercultural competence, as proposed by Jürgen Bolten, does not just, however, underscore the importance of navigating uncertainty constructively. It also centres on the importance of fostering an ability to communicate effectively and harmoniously across cultures, defined broadly and

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fluidly, and in fuzzy cultural spaces. This competence does not merely concern the confronting of unfamiliarity, but the bridging of gaps, the establishment of connections, and the fostering of mutual understanding in a world characterized by increased interconnectivity (Bolten, 2015, p. 109).

As already stated, the digital space today plays a pivotal role in shaping interculturality. It is an ever-expanding field of action, which does not only intensify spontaneous encounters with unfamiliarity, but can also be used strategically for cultivating intercultural competence. The Internet offers individuals the opportunity to engage with diverse perspectives, access global information, and connect with people with various cultural backgrounds. Thus, intercultural competence in today's world involves not only adapting to newness but also actively engaging with it, harnessing the potential for personal growth and inclusive societal transformation.

Prior to dedicating the second volume in the series "Studies in Digital Interculturality", stemming from the second ReDICo-E-Co-Conference on "Cosmopolitanism in a Postdigital, Postmigrant Europe, and Beyond," to the diverse manifestations of cosmopolitan and authoritarian dynamics in the digital realm, this volume purposefully centres on the harnessing of the digital sphere's potential to foster intercultural competence. This is to be seen in the supporting of the transformation of interculturality into culturality by postdigital lifewide learning processes, contributing potentially to the development of a cohesive and inclusive world society.

Lifewide learning takes centre stage in this volume and, driven by their unique research enquiries, each chapter offers insights into the emergence of various culturalities within the digital realm. Nuala O'Connor, an award-winning Irish author, has already commenced the volume with her flash fiction piece "Of Wineapples and Acorns", written especially for the ReDICo conference. While some chapters delve into informal learning, others explore strategies employed in formal education and provide concrete case studies. Despite this diversity in research objectives and disciplinary perspectives, a connecting thread may be seen among the chapters.

To enhance clarity and coherence, we have structured the nine chapters into three sections, each guided by a distinct thematic focus and accompanied by a graphical representation from the Chilean artist Akemi Paz, created especially for the ReDICo conference.

In the section entitled "Playful Learning, Serious Content", the three chapters not only provide examples but also engage in critical examination of how playful frameworks can effectively convey substantial content. This exploration

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encompasses informal interactions on social media and innovative formalized frameworks within higher education.

All three chapters in the second section, "Online Connection, Onsite Inclusion", centre on the crucial role of digital platforms in supporting newcomers as they grapple with the complexities of integrating into new environments. These chapters illuminate the interplay between online and onsite experiences in fostering a sense of belonging, emphasizing how digital tools can facilitate inclusion, making it more accessible and effective.

Lastly, in the section labelled "New Teaching, New Frontiers", the spotlight shifts to the opportunities and challenges brought forth by digital technology in the realm of formal education. These chapters underscore the significance of overcoming barriers, whether they pertain to geographical distance or limitations in competence, to advance learning in the digital age.

1. Playful Learning, Serious Content

Jürgen Bolten's article "Scimification: Holistic Competence Scenario Development and the Example of Virtual Intercultural Escape Rooms and Simulation Games" introduces the concept of "Scimification", a term he coined by merging the terms "science" and "gamification". This concept encourages exploration of the opportunities presented by digitalization in the development of creative educational approaches. It emphasizes the importance of addressing the complex interplay between knowledge, skills, and motivation, not least in higher educational contexts. While challenging the long-term suitability of traditional cognitive teaching formats, he also introduces educational innovations, such as virtual escape rooms and strategy games, which may significantly contribute to the holistic development of competencies.

The strategy game "Megacities", featured also in Jürgen Bolten's first chapter, serves as the backdrop for Milene Mendes de Oliveira and Mario Antonio Tuccillo's investigation into interactional patterns fostering intercultural learning in remote virtual teams. In their chapter entitled "Intercultural Learning as an Interactional Achievement in a Digital Space", they conduct a microanalysis of interactions among old and new members of an international team, and complement this with an examination of learning journals authored by the strategy game players themselves. The study uncovers distinct learning paths for newcomers, emphasizes the strategic role that digital tools may play, and

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underscores the responsibility of existing group members in newcomers' inclusion in the group in the formation of a shared culture.

In the chapter "Learning About Colonialism by Scrolling? The Twitter Thread as Lifewide Textual Offer and Cosmopolitan Potentiality", Fergal Lenehan explores informal learning processes within social media, specifically Twitter. His chapter delves into threaded conversations on Twitter relating to European colonialism. The author emphasizes that the, at times, interactive nature of Twitter threads, where users may textually engage with each other, fosters a learning process which may lead to a shift of perspectives. This argumentation aligns with Reischmann's lifewide learning concept, emphasizing its voluntary and subjective nature, and connects, he argues, with Delanty's thesis that exposure to global issues may transform perspectives. As discussed by Fergal Lenehan in this volume, Twitter threads offer a platform where cosmopolitan cultures may emerge and, indeed, spread.

2. Online Connection, Onsite Inclusion

Yolanda López García's chapter "Exploring the Interplay of Lifewide Learning, Migration, and Social Network Sites in the Postdigital Field of Action" focuses on the potential of Facebook for informal learning. Following the bricolage approach, the author undertakes a multimodal analysis of two Facebook groups in which Latin American migrants in Europe offer emotional support to each other, while sharing knowledge and covering a variety of topics relevant in different phases, from decision-making concerning initial migration to managing life in the new country of residence. In this digital space, migrants find a vital platform to address questions that may otherwise remain unanswered. Through co-creating a common 'E-maginary', they not only share what they have learned but also enable others to learn from their experiences.

In their chapter entitled "Does Integration Still Take Place 'at the Local Level'? Challenging a German Integration Paradigm in a Postdigital World," Roman Lietz and Magdalena Loska critically dissect the traditional German discourse on integration. They argue that the focus on the material, local context no longer aligns with the postdigital reality of migrants. Today, migrants navigate a complex web of connections: their local community, diaspora, and their community of origin, all intertwined digitally. Drawing from recent empirical studies across Europe and North America, the authors reveal the multifaceted impact of ICT on migrants, including the profound influence on

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identity development. Their work paints a comprehensive picture of how digitalization reshapes integration patterns, emphasizing the intricate interplay between migrants and their diverse cultural spheres.

In the final chapter of this section, "Buddy-Culture Goes Viral: Meaning and Potentiality of the Buddy-Approach in and Outside Formal Educational Settings", Luisa Conti, Janice Darmanin, Christine Fenech, and Klara Räthel present a hybrid educational design developed within a European Innovation Project to enhance the inclusion of young migrants. Using a digital platform, the project aims to foster key competences among both migrant and non-migrant students, teachers, and educators, promoting the buddy-system and disseminating the buddy-culture. The article addresses the lack of systematic research on this topic by exploring the core characteristics and objectives of the buddy approach, drawing insights from a systematic literature review on peer buddy systems and empirical data from buddy initiatives in Germany.

3. New Teaching, New Frontiers

In her chapter "'Global Classroom': Postdigital Connecting Across Continents", Siobhan Brownlie explores an initiative undertaken by three universities spanning different continents. The goal of their collaborative 'Global Classroom' module was to enhance students' understanding of diverse political, social, and cultural issues. The author critically examines whether the arrangement of guest lectures, student presentations, and Q&A sessions on the selected topics could foster the emergence of a "small culture" and cultivate a postdigital critical cosmopolitan perspective among participants. Additionally, she reflects on the influence of the postdigital reality on student participation. Comparing the module's methodology to Virtual Exchange, Brownlie emphasizes the absence of peer-to-peer interaction in small groups, questioning its implications for the development of intercultural competence.

Virtual Exchange (VE), as a concept and a practice, takes centre stage in Rawan Tahboub's chapter, "Virtual Exchange as a Mechanism for Digital Education." Integrating her perspectives as both a scientist and a practitioner, the author explores the methodology of Virtual Exchange which aims to foster intercultural dialogue and knowledge sharing. Drawing from literature on facilitative pedagogy, documentation of specific VE programs, and her personal field observations, she compares various VE initiatives, elaborating key elements that guide the method's practical implementation and that explain

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its pedagogical significance. Reflecting on its transformative impact, she argues for VE's potential in promoting peace education. Moreover, through her analysis, Rawan Tahboub underscores the success that Virtual Exchange has achieved in higher education in relation to the creation of culturality, and advocates for its broader recognition and adoption.

The chapter "Digital Competences in the Educational Sphere: A Case Study From Italy," authored by Tanja Schroot, Giulia Maria Cavaletto, and Roberta Ricucci, highlights the challenges posed by limited digital competence in the realm of pedagogical practice. The article explores digitalization in education in a case study drawn from the city of Turin, considering teachers' and students' competence, technical resources, as well as a variety of further factors that impact the use of digital tools for educational purposes and the creation of a new digital educational culture. The empirical study sheds light on critical aspects which underscore the necessity for teachers and educators to embrace a transformative approach: Digital integration demands a fundamental change in teaching culture, with educators first needing to fully understand its advantages.

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Playful Learning, Serious Games

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Scimification

Holistic Competence Scenario Development and the Example of Virtual Intercultural Escape Rooms and Strategy Games[1]

Jürgen Bolten

Abstract *Scimification is a newly constructed word composed from the words science and gamification. In terms of content, it describes a realized form of the reciprocal connection between the competence levels of knowledge (cognitive level), ability (conative level) and will (affective level) in digital and virtual university teaching. The question of whether, and if so, how, science and gamification fit together, arises with urgency against the backdrop of the corona-accelerated digitalization movement in higher educational teaching: Should games such as virtual strategy games be taken seriously at all in academic training and further education? Conversely, against the background of significantly changed teaching/learning scenarios, the question arises as to whether cognitive teaching/learning formats, such as 90-minute lectures, remain suitable for the initiation and maintenance of sustainable learning. Using the example of interdisciplinary and transnational university cooperation, this chapter outlines how virtual escape rooms and strategy games can contribute to the promotion of holistic competence development processes. They may also stimulate new curricular directions for the methodology-based didactic implementation of digitalization and internationalization.*

Keywords *Scimification; Gamification; Virtual Escape Rooms; Digitalization; Internationalization*

1 This chapter is based on a paper given by Jürgen Bolten at the ReDICo E-Co-Conference "Lifewide Learning: Transformations and New Connections in Postdigital Societies", held at the Dornburger Castles, Jena, on 1 July 2022. It was translated from German into English by Fergal Lenehan.

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1. Corona and its Consequences: A 'New Normal' for Teaching and Learning Scenarios?

Since the spring of 2020 continuous speculation has reigned, from a wide variety of perspectives and in relation to various facets of life, as to what features may constitute the 'new normal' following the Corona pandemic (see e.g. Minkmar, 2021). What is common to most forecasts and visions of the future is their provisional sense: Are reliable statements on long-term structural developments possible at all in such a volatile 'between-stage' of 'finished' but, yet 'not quite finished' pandemic?

Precisely for this reason the search for a 'new normal' is a central and at the same time a paradoxical issue; an expression of a longing for clarity, for clear rules, a sense of constancy and consistent explanatory power – knowing full well that the 'new' quality of normality will consist of an unquestionable increase in uncertainty and ambiguity, not only technological but also ecological. In this sense, 'normality' represents actually the 'not-normal' (from a contemporary perspective) and an 'uncertainty' which is disruptively generated and whose structures are fragile, fuzzy and tend to retain a limited and temporary validity.

In other words: In the interplay between structure and process, i.e. between culturality as unquestioned "relevance", "plausibility" and rule-formation (e.g. Schütz & Luckmann, 1991) and inter-culturality as the uncertain, the unfamiliar and the fluid (Kron & Weihrauch, 2021), the balance of power seems to have shifted towards the processual and the uncertain, in the sense of what is currently often referred to via the acronym VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity) (Abidi & Joshi, 2015).[2]

2 With the further acceleration of global technological, ecological, and economic dynamics of change, the more present and relevant the "inter-cultural" will become as a primary experience of uncertainty in familiar contexts characterized by culturality: Global and local, culturality and interculturality will increasingly lose the sharpness of their demarcation and instead represent a dynamic and ambiguous context of reference. Intercultural competence is thus expanding into a "VUCA competence", which still references classic experiences of uncertainty, for example in international assignments in which normalcy, plausibility and relevance are largely unrecognizable thus making routine action not clearly possible. However, due to the increased disruptive experiences of uncertainty – resulting from the consequences of climate change, pandemics, and the future failure of digital global networks – such a predominant deficit of culturality structures will increasingly gain prominence in culturally-familiar fields

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In higher educational institutions, which remain the primary focus of this chapter, the departure from the 'old' structures of normality with the onset of the pandemic was at least not entirely unprepared for, as both digitalization and internationalization had already been a "core task of higher education development" (HRK, 2015) in Germany for several years. Although digitalization and internationalization represent a central component of – most – higher educational institutions' target and performance agreements with the respective federal states in Germany[3], many of the strategies were not ready for practical application at the time of the complete suspension of face-to-face third-level teaching in March 2020.

According to a study by the Stifterverband für Deutsche Wissenschaft – a non-profit registered association which looks to connect the fields of education, science and entrepreneurial innovation[4] – in the winter semester 2019/20, according to the university teachers surveyed, just 12 % of the courses were digitally available, whereas "since the beginning of the pandemic, the proportion increased to 91 %"[5] (Winde et al., 2020, p. 2; see also Buchholz et al., 2020 and Besa et al., 2021). This adjustment usually took place within 30 days, sometimes even faster (Winde et al., 2020, p. 2).

Accordingly, what has often been experienced as "forced digitalization by Covid 19" (Sonnleitner 2021, p. 183) has, on the other hand, given not only digitalization but also, indirectly, internationalization efforts at universities an enormous and unexpected developmental boost:

> The abrupt rethinking and reorganization, especially with regard to teaching [...] allowed virtual forms of internationalization to become, within a very short time, in many cases the only way to maintain international connections, to allow international students to continue to participate in the university life of the host institution and to offer international experience to German students. (Bendenlier & Bruhn-Zaß, 2021, p. 11)

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of agency. This will make, therefore, intercultural competence especially necessary and relevant, and in an expanded sense (see: Bolten 2017 and Bolten/Berhault 2018).

3 In the case of third-party funded project applications, the existence of clearly formulated internationalization and digitalization goals have increasingly become prerequisites for the successful awarding of funding.

4 More than 11,000 students and 1,800 teachers took part in the survey, which was conducted by the Stifterverband in association with McKinsey & Company, Inc.

5 All translations by Fergal Lenehan.

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The "virtual internationalization" (Bendenlier & Bruhn-Zaß, 2021, p. 9) as well as the short-term conversion of teaching to digital formats required (and still requires) a large degree of willingness to improvise on the part of all involved. Schaller (2021, p. 30) formulates how this is seen from the perspective of students:

> Face-to-face classes suddenly become digital lectures, journeys to the university and the walking distances between lectures are no longer necessary, group work or preparation for presentations in the form of joint meetings require new organizational ideas. The measures of the Corona pandemic, thus, not only have an effect on their learning and organizational behaviour, but also on their social life. Common breaks with fellow students, the morning coffee in the cafeteria, the chat in between – none of this takes place as usual anymore.

The recommendation, arising from this, for students is to "restructure their day and define new (digital) processes for their mode of work" (Schaller, 2021, p. 30), and is ultimately a plea to take the construction of a 'new normality' into their own hands. What ultimately must be structured individually and very differently with regard to the framework conditions of learning@home (time and media management, social contacts, adaptation to exercise and nutrition, etc.), also has an effect on satisfaction levels with one's own learning experience.

According to the Stifterverband survey, this dropped from 85 % in the winter semester of 2019/20 to 51 % in the first Corona summer semester of 2020: "Reasons for this include a lack of social life among students, problems with motivation and concentration when learning from home, and insufficient opportunities for exchange with teachers" (Winde et al., 2020, p. 4).

Accordingly, teachers were challenged not only professionally but also didactically to transform (or redesign) their content from face-to-face to online formats in as short a time as possible, as well as ensuring that motivation was encouraged, concentration maintained, and personal contacts continued to somehow be initiated. This is a task that should not be underestimated, especially since, according to the survey cited above – although with a clearly decreasing tendency – "one in four teachers view digital formats negatively" (Winde et al., 2020, p. 7).

Since, at the commencement of the pandemic, digitalization activities in the field of higher education had begun – more or less intensively – but had

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not yet reached the status of normality, a digitalization 'culture' with sufficient practical experience and conventionalized rules of action had not yet been established. The aforementioned 'digitalization compulsion' was therefore premature from a developmental perspective and triggered uncertainties and negative effects that would probably not have occurred – to this extent anyway at least – if the cultural change had taken place without disruption.

Due to the pressure of having to co-constitute a 'new normality', digitalization initiatives have often created a paradoxical situation – because they have been implemented 'too quickly' for many actors, they have led to a complexity-related loss of motivation[6] and to concentration weaknesses[7]. In short, this situation has contributed to a situation of indeterminacy, which, in view of the still unpredictable duration of the festering pandemic, apparently cannot be overcome in any other way than through digitalization.

It seems clear that the measures themselves will have to change. What will emerge as the 'new normal' in the field of digitalization requires a long-term and continuous negotiation process between technology development and user acceptance. How such a process will proceed, what will be developed, accepted, and further developed and what will not, can only be vaguely

6 Loss of motivation results, among other things, from the 'too much and too fast' of the digitalization process, e.g., from the high innovation dynamics of software development (the necessity of permanently learning about the use of new 'tools'), to the lack of clarity as to what should exactly be learned and in what way.

7 Causes of the concentration deficits lamented in the Stifterverband study result from multimedia practices: The smartphone, which is available to secure technical connections via the PC or as a supplement to them (e.g., when using voting tools), tempts people to engage in parallel social media activities, for example. This further increases the already multi-channel perception requirements: the 'old' all-in-one perception of face-to-face teaching is now distributed across channels such as audio, visualizations on the split screen, video segments, one's own webcam, chat functions and possibly even subtitles. In addition, there may be specific perception requirements of the home office environment, such as children requiring certain things, flat mates in the adjoining room or, indeed, curious pets.

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predicted.[8] This leads to consciously experimental and sometimes improvisational behaviour within the very process itself.

A case in point from the context of digitalization is the lack of response to MOOCs imported from the USA at the beginning of the 2010s in the higher education sector: Massive Open Online Contents (MOOCs) use new technological possibilities with which, for example, lectures could be placed online and distributed worldwide. This process was linked to business models that sought to improve the income levels of universities. Less relevant were reflections upon higher educational pedagogy and as to whether, for example, face-to-face lecture formats with a duration of up to 90 minutes, and without further learning support, would be accepted at all. MOOCs were ultimately not widely accepted (Beck, 2015) because they were not relationally conceived as components of a complex system within a variety of connectivity options and were, accordingly, rejected by the face-to-face teaching system, which was still clearly dominant at this time.

As a reaction to this, experiments were conducted with "MOOC games" (Tan, 2013) in an attempt to establish a relationship with possible target groups in a playful and effective way and in an attempt to situate MOOCs within existing learning cultures. Another variant with similar objectives is to be seen with Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL):

> In contrast to MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), smaller teams usually cooperate with each other in COIL formats in time-limited, closed, seminar-like structures. The students have to meet several requirements in the process: They organize themselves in university-mixed teams, solve tasks together in synchronous and asynchronous settings and in this way produce performance records. (Schillig & Girschik, 2021, p. 61)

8 Tools such as Miro, wonder.me or video conferencing systems such as Zoom, which are now widespread in university teaching and also standard in the context of negotiation processes for data protection guidelines, were largely unknown before the pandemic, but these tools will play a central role, with decisions to be made as to which further technological developments are oriented towards them, with certain adaptations. In this way, dynamic networks with specific digitalization cultures emerge – with quasi-guidance by the 'invisible hand'.

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2. Affective Access, Conative Collaboration Scenarios and Cognitive Anchoring: The Holistic Orientation of the Scimification-Approach

As this attempt in relation to MOOCs has not led to the desired success, at least in the German MOOC scenario[9], it suggests that a playful approach does not *per se* also lead to the intended effect of attracting and retaining learners for learning subjects.

Controversies surrounding the meaning and benefits of including playful elements within learning processes – which have of course been undertaken since the earliest days of school pedagogy – in a digital context occupy the entire spectrum of reactions, between vehement rejection and enthusiastic advocacy. Thus, on the one hand, the danger of "losing sight of the seriousness of learning and academic activity and losing oneself as an educational institution in the shallow waters of the fun society" (Martens, 2009, p. 39) is emphasized, while, on the other hand, extremely enthusiastic reports on the successes of edutainment measures[10] are also to be seen (see e.g. Gris & Bengtson, 2021).

Empirical studies on the advantages and disadvantages of the use of games and gamification and the practice of game-based learning (GBL)[11] are indeed numerous, but also have not been able to clearly resolve this controversy, as recent meta-analytical comparisons show: Hoblitz (2015) summarizes that game-based learning slightly increases motivation in the classroom, but hardly improves learning effectiveness.

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9 As far as can be observed, there are still no empirical studies on the success or otherwise of the MOOC game strategy. In Germany, since the end of the MOOC hype in the mid-2010s, there has been a "relatively high degree of scepticism", as the study from the project "MOOCs After the Gold Rush" summarizes (Hüther et al. 2020, p. 70). According to the study, "none of the universities interviewed in Germany [...] plans to offer mini-courses of study or full courses of study as MOOCs" (Hüther et al. 2020, p. 70).

10 Edutainment is a newly invented word mixing 'education' and 'entertainment'.

11 Games may be embedded in learning processes, but basically exist independently of them. In gamification, game elements or playful tools (e.g., virtual reality glasses, virtual escape rooms or quiz formats, such as Kahoot) are integrated into contexts that are initially not game-based, such as conventional teaching/learning processes, while game-based learning makes playfulness the basis of the learning process. These include, for example, serious games. On the typology of the different game perspectives, see also Jaeger (2015).

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Schaumburg (2018, p. 29f) comes to similar conclusions in her meta-analytical comparison: The effects of games on learning are positive, but the effect size is rather low. Important, however, is her (Schaumburg, 2018, p. 36) argument that "the learning effectiveness depends decisively on the reflection of one's own procedure in the handling of game scenarios", and that above all the way in which the game elements are didactically embedded is "decisive for the learning effectiveness" (Schaumburg, 2018, p. 37). When assessing the effectiveness under relational aspects, the question thus is not so much how good or bad a game or gaming element is, but to what extent is it suitable to be didactically implemented, and to what extent is this actually realized in the concrete individual case.

Competency models provide an orientation for the assessment of didactically successful implementations.[12] Even if the current structuring of the concept of competence varies greatly, competence concepts generally use grids that refer more or less explicitly to Heinrich Roth and/or Franz E. Weinert. In his *Pädagogische Anthropologie* (Pedagogical Anthropology) (1971) Roth divided the areas of competence into subject competence, social competence, and self-competence, which – supplemented by methodological competence in later discussions – still represents an important orientation framework for the development of education plans. This "broad concept of competence" (Detjen et al., 2012, p. 19), which clearly goes beyond the transfer of "information knowledge" (Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2016, p. 49), has been expanded in the context of the Pisa discussions.

According to Weinert (2001, p. 27f), competences describe the "cognitive abilities and skills available to or learnable by individuals to solve certain problems as well as the associated motivational, volitional and social readiness and abilities to use the problem solutions successfully and responsibly in variable situations." From Weinert's perspective, the interaction of cognitive competences and motivational orientations is constant for action competence. The functional aspect ('knowing, wanting, acting') that is also considered here has been anchored in educational policy across the board following the so-called Klieme expert report (2003) *Zur Entwicklung nationaler Bildungsstandards* (On the Development of National Educational Standards). Even if there are sensitivities within the competence discourse that do not seem to be necessarily conducive to an integration of the Roth and Weinert traditions (see e.g. Erpenbeck

12 Compare also Bolten (2016a) on the concept of competence.

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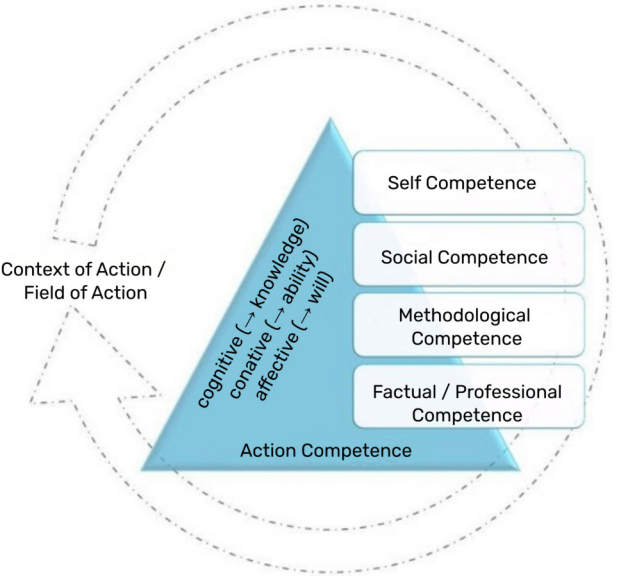
& Sauter, 2016, p. 74), a combination of both areas is likely to be expedient. Interfaces with intercultural competence research are obvious, although these tend to refer to cognitive, affective, and conative attitudinal components (Eppenstein et al., 2015; Bolten, 2016; Bolten 2020a). These interrelationships are more clearly shown in Figure 1:

Fig. 1: Action Competence: Structural Features and Contextualization



(Jürgen Bolten's representation, recreated by Carmen Pereyra)

With regard to the effectiveness of the digital tools used, it may be concluded that this is dependent on the degree of holistic tool implementation regarding their interconnection with the competence levels – in the sense of the meaning of the etymological origin of 'competence', namely from the Latin verb competere: to bring together. If the didactic implementation succeeds in the sense of such an interconnection of the affective, conative and cognitive competence levels, there is the chance of a high learning effectiveness through the fact that "competence development takes place as a circular movement" (Er-

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penbeck & Sauter, 2016, p. 112), or better still in the sense of a spiral movement with its own dynamics.

In the theoretical positioning of recent competence discourses, the importance of the holistic aspect is beyond question: It is a matter of eliminating the "separation between the cognitive realm and the motivational realm" and modelling practical measures with which "motivational and affective aspects can be included as determinants of learning success" (Münzer, 2012, p. 3).[13] Appropriately holistic approaches take into account the ever more extensive networking of learning processes due to digitalization. For competence research, however, the stronger consideration of the interconnectedness and the non-linear character of its subject area also presupposes the willingness to review its own concept of science:

> Thinking in networks is another way of thinking. At least in the Western world, networks and systems are broken down into parts in order to deal with them individually. The concept of science emerged from this reductionist view: The word 'science' is derived from the Indo-Germanic root 'skei-', which means 'separation' or 'sepe-ration'. Problems are broken down into parts in order to be able to deal with them better [...] and the holistic view is excluded. (Zenk & Behrend, 2010, p. 212)

However, a holistic understanding of 'science' must not mean an undifferentiated holism, but one in which the analytical depth of 'modern science' is preserved in its diversity and this diversity itself enables cohesive dynamics. The impetus here is the affective, which "with all its underlying directions of force", is the movement towards "charging action with energy" (Dahms, 2019, p. 15).

As shown, the strength of the affective aspect also remains dependent on a holistic perspective. This is less of an issue when game-based learning elements are regarded merely as supplementary, as is often the case in schools when games are used in substitute lessons. In higher education, the acceptance of the inclusion of game elements has been gradually increasing – but still rather remains on the level of a 'nice-to-have', which at least does no harm:

13 However, the idea of a holistic understanding of competence associated with this does not correspond to practice. In practice, according to the critical view of current PISA and Bologna implementations, "the mighty and powerful knowledge transfer and assessment system continues to be granted dominance via distancing diagnosis and evaluation" (Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2012, p 22).

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"Even in the classic forms of teaching, be it lecture, seminar, exercise or practical course, a loosening up through game aspects can certainly not be a disadvantage" (Martens, 2009, p. 45).

In digital contexts, the same is true for gamification applications: Learning progress indicators, quizzes, opinion polls, digital 'energisers', etc. have become increasingly popular because, for example in the case of a high-content complexity of teaching, they create a free space for short-term diversion and relaxation and – depending on the tool – promote social relationships. At the same time, they are criticized for their extrinsic and merely situational motivational effect (Conway, 2014).

However, the criticism basically concerns not the gamification tools themselves rather than their lack of didactic integration (Kerres, 2018): Thus, even if they are used selectively, playful elements can serve as motivational 'door openers'. It is important, however, to indeed keep the door open – for example, by ensuring that gamification elements do not only serve to 'loosen up' the teaching situation but are given defined functions within the content development of a learning process.

With such a step, playfulness no longer proves to be a separate or added tool, but an integral part of the learning process, in the broader sense of a "game-based learning."[14]

3. Action in Cooperative and Collaborative Scenario

In Game Based Learning (GBL), playful elements are an essential part of the learning process. The focus is on competence development on a conative level: It is about the application of knowledge, for example in serious games[15]; also, in simulation games or in strategy games (Martens, 2009, p. 42).

14 Gamification elements such as rankings, bonuses, badges and point systems are also used, for example, in serious games as forms of game-based learning. For a distinction between gamification, digital game-based learning, and serious games, see Farber, 2018.

15 Examples of serious games in the school sector are above all "Dragonbox" (see: https://dragon-box.com/products/elements last accessed 29.9.21) or in the secondary/tertiary education sector subject-specific games in which one can go through team-building processes within the framework of video games or apply the knowledge learned in architecture, medicine, psychology etc. (see: https://seriousgames-portal.org/ last accessed 29.9.21).

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Video games usually link knowledge acquired separately in teaching programmes with game actions, in that the players have to prove their acquired competences in a given game action by means of avatar characters. The game itself usually takes place separately from the classical teaching context. This can be fascinating in well-designed games, but usually retains a "nice to have" image. The separation is reinforced by the outsourcing of the players to an artificial avatar figure, which – similar to role-playing games – can be assigned alibi functions if actions are not successful. If avatars or roles are not provided for, the players are responsible for their actions as real persons. In simulation games, this applies to a somewhat more limited extent, in that business administration students simulate[16], for example, decisions made by managers in specific industries, while the players in strategy games or *Planspiele*[17] are identical to the game participants.

The advantages of digitally supported and (e.g. through videoconferencing) virtualized simulation games and strategy games are especially evident in connection with the intensified internationalization@home measures due to Corona: They enable the implementation of transnational cooperation with relatively little effort (see Kappe et al., 2021). Within this framework, intercultural experience can be gained, multilingualism practized, and international university relations intensified. Examples include the implementation of a TOPSIM simulation game by student teams from Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences and the German-Turkish University of Istanbul (Kappe et al., 2021), as well as the transnational, intercultural strategy games "Megacities" (Bolten,

16 See: "TOPSIM – Going Global: The management simulation game depicts six economic regions with different framework conditions. In the role of the management of a washing machine manufacturer, the participants initially operate exclusively in their home region. Soon, however, the focus shifts to the internationalization of the company's activities. Learning content: Corporate mission statement; expansion decisions; international marketing mix; strategic marketing" (see: KB_TOPSIM_GoingGlobal.pdf; retrieved on 31.8.21).

17 "TOPSIM – Marketing: In the strategic and competitive business strategy game (Unternehmensplanspiel) TOPSIM – Marketing, the participants manage the marketing department of a manufacturing company. The participants control the operational processes from production to marketing of the products. Depending on the scenario, the products may consist of watches, mobile phones or sport shoes. Furthermore, participants decide on the strategic orientation of the company. Learning content: Objectives and instruments of marketing, market analysis; strategic production programme planning; test marketing; contribution margin calculation" (See: KB_TOPSIM_Marketing.pdf, retrieved on 31.8.21).

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2016) and "Bilangon" (Bolten & Berhault, 2019; Bolten & Nietzel, 2021), both conducted via the "Glocal Campus".[18]

Since interculturally unpredictable dynamics are generated by the participants themselves due to the transnational collaboration in the strategy game, virtual strategy games may be seen as intercultural competence developmental actions: The aim is to be constructively competent not only in predominantly familiar contexts (see Fig 1), but also in unfamiliar contexts in which plausibility, normality, relevance and possibilities for routine action are predominantly not given (see Fig. 2, Bolten, 2020a and footnote 1).

Depending on the subject embedding of the strategy games, the learning target focus changes: for example, in the field of intercultural studies, the focus is primarily on the application of intercultural theory and model knowledge, while in the field of business studies, business knowledge is implemented and intercultural competences are addressed more as additional "future skills relevant to the labour market" (Kappe et al., 2021, p. 74).[19] The same applies to international projects that are carried out collaboratively without being embedded in game stories, such as the cooperation in the cross-national production of learning videos (Münch-Mankova & Müller de Acevedo, 2021, p. 155; see also O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016).

The extent to which the strategy games and projects are linked to the cognitive part of teaching, in which the knowledge to be applied was taught, depends on the curricular conditions and the didactic-methodological initiatives of those doing the teaching: Debriefings may take on a bridging function, provided that scenarios of knowledge transfer such as seminars, lectures, etc. offer corresponding reconnection interfaces. If this is not the case, there will be no self-contained dynamic interlocking of the competence levels and no holistic

18 90 universities from 31 countries are involved in the glocal-campus.org learning platform, which is managed by the University of Jena and interculture.de. The platform serves to internationalize teaching and research in the fields of architecture, education, engineering, IT, intercultural studies, medicine, and urban studies. In addition to the exchange of digital teaching, joint lecture series and projects, intercultural strategy games on interdisciplinary topics are carried out on an ongoing basis. See the DAAD-funded IVAC project "Blended collaboration in intercultural simulation games": https://vi-gil.uni-jena.de.

19 An important future task of intercultural research and teaching could be to develop practical forms of intercultural support for international academic collaboration scenarios and processes.

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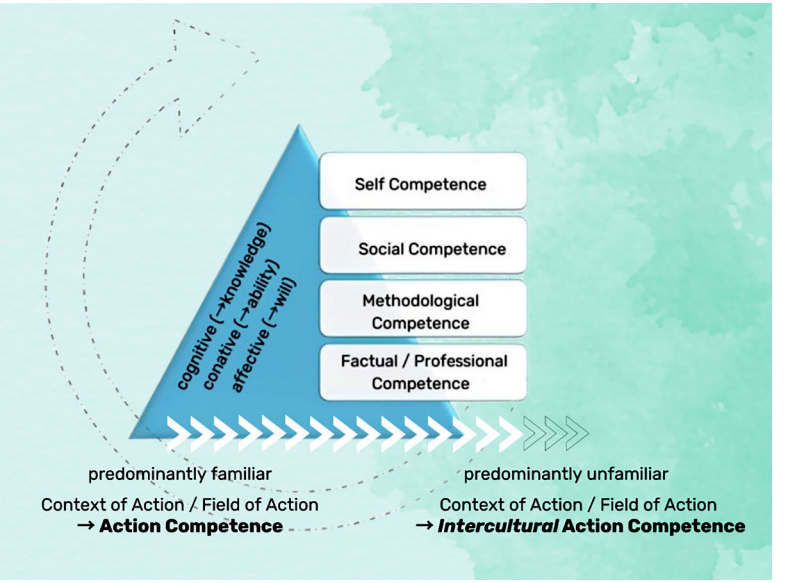
teaching/learning process at this point: Collaborative cooperation would remain, then, more or less isolated as an 'exercise' at the level of conatively-oriented teaching.

Fig. 2: Action Competence and Intercultural Action Competence



(Jürgen Bolten's own representation, recreated by Carmen Pereyra)

4. Holistic Orientation of the Scimification Approach

In view of the need for rapid change in higher educational teaching due to the pandemic, it is possible at this point to summarize the discussion on the inclusion of game contexts from a methodological-didactic point of view:

- A 1:1 conversion from face-to-face to online teaching is too complex to ensure the necessary level of concentration and motivation. Comparable to the experiences with didactically non-embedded MOOCs, not only too

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much learning content but also too little social contact has a negative effect on learning motivation. Game references can counteract this.

- On the cognitive level of the teaching/learning processes, too much content can be counteracted by designing shorter learning units (for lectures 20–30 minutes instead of 1.5 hours). The effect is reinforced by an appropriately varied media design (visualizations, educasts, gamification).
- The creation of affective access to learning content, such as that offered by gamification tools, relieves concentration and offers good opportunities for, at least, a selective improvement in motivation, provided they are linked to the learning process. If this is not the case, gamification can become an end in itself and divert from the learning process.
- Game-based learning primarily serves the application of acquired knowledge and promotes the development of the conative competence level. The spectrum of offerings ranges from video games to virtual strategy games: Video games refer to general knowledge content on a specific topic rather than to concrete learning processes and scenarios. Virtual strategy games are open-ended, potentially have a high degree of embeddedness in learning scenarios (e.g. in the context of debriefings) and promote the development of social relationships due to their basic collaborative structure.
- Interfaces between the three competence levels are potentially available in digital learning scenarios through gamification or collaboration tools and offer technological advantages over traditional group work in seminars (e.g. storage/export functions and gamification elements in interactive white boards[20], or design possibilities of virtual world cafés[21], which thus facilitate access to collaborative work on an affective level).

There is room for improvement in the practice of linking the described intersections to a holistic learning process in which gamification, game learning and scientific research and development intertwine as components of a teaching/learning process and initiate a momentum and dynamic of their own.

How corresponding scimification approaches may be conceived and implemented is outlined in conclusion on the basis of two IVAC (International

20 E.g. Miro.com.

21 A digital world café may be created using, for example, the tool wonder.me.

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Virtual Academic Collaboration) projects that were worked on at the University of Jena (Intercultural Business Communication) from 2020–22.[22]

5. Scimification: A Practical Example

IVAC (International Virtual Academic Collaboration) is a programme funded by the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research and implemented by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to promote the integration of digital collaboration formats in study programmes within the framework of international teaching cooperation. The University of Jena (Intercultural Business Communication) participated in the first call for proposals in 2020/21 with the project VIGIL, and in the second (2022) with the project VEERIL. VIGIL, at its centre, concerns the implementing and updating of the virtual intercultural strategy games "Megacities" (Bolten, 2016) and "Bilangon 21" (Bolten & Nietzel, 2021), as well as developing a train-the-trainer course for moderating and debriefing virtual intercultural strategy games.

The VEERIL project was concerned with the development of a virtual Educational Escape Room. Other universities participating in both projects include: Université de Montréal (Canada), Université de Poitiers (France), Åbo Akademi University Turku (Finland), Alexandru Ioan Cuza University Iaşi (Romania), Adam Mickiewicz University Poznań (Poland), and the Beijing Foreign Studies University Beijing (China).

The scimification approach builds on the IVAC projects and links them to a teaching/learning scenario in which affective, conative, and cognitive competence levels are interdependently interlocked. In order to achieve this holistic effect, the scimification approach, visualized in Fig. 3, is structured into three activity stages.

22 In relation to IVAC, see: https://www.kooperation-international.de/aktuelles/bekanntmachungen/detail/info/daad-foerderprogramm-ivac-zur-internationalen-virtuellen-akademischen-zusammenarbeit and https://www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/ivac/ (10.09.21).

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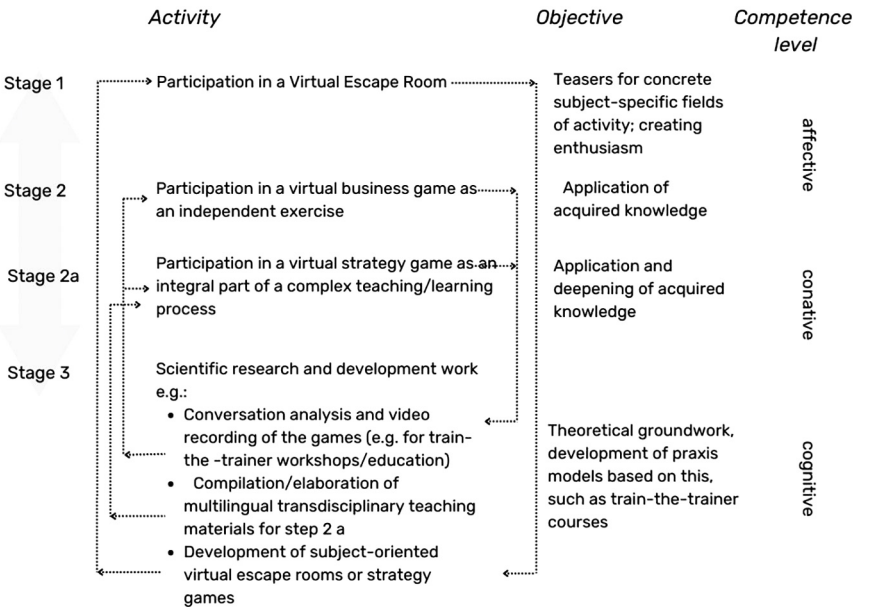
Fig. 3: Scimification Approach



(Jürgen Bolten's own representation, recreated by Carmen Pereyra)

Stage 1 includes participation in a virtual Educational Escape Room.[23] The primary target groups of the version developed in the VEERIL project, with the focus on intercultural learning, were students who wish to include international experience (also virtual) in their studies within the framework of international university exchange programmes, blended mobility activities, or internationalization@home initiatives. It was also aimed at employees in international offices, language centres, and administrative departments involved

23 The learning environment of an "Educational Escape Room" (EdER), originating from the USA, remains largely unknown in the European context (see the research report by Veldkamp et al., 2020). Unlike conventional escape rooms, the aim here is less to achieve a goal (e.g. deciphering a code to leave the room by solving tasks), but to experience the solution path as a motivating learning process and to become eager to deepen acquired and applied knowledge after completing the escape room activities.

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with central tasks in the internationalization processes of their respective universities.

One of the main objectives is to motivate people in a playful way to understand and accept the challenges of international cooperation such as multilingualism, varying mindsets, unfamiliarity, and uncertainty as potential opportunities. A central result is, therefore, to overcome threatening feelings, e.g. in foreign-language or generally undefined or 'foreign' situations; not to withdraw, but to find the courage and desire to become active oneself.

The tasks of the intercultural escape room aim to provide a low-threshold and playful way of gaining initial experience in dealing constructively with unfamiliar and possibly unsettling situations. Uncertainty is created through exercises in which the participants are confronted in the virtual escape room with, for example, foreign/multilingual situations, different mindsets, implausible or ambiguous contexts of action, disruptive developments, and, apparently, untransparent facts. A game group should consist of 4–6 people from different universities and be international.

At the beginning of their work in the escape room, the participants are introduced in a lingua franca to the case study they are solving. They are asked to write down all of the expertise they think they can personally contribute to the solution of the case study. The collection of expertise is then visible to all the participants and suggests, for the course of the game, who among the participants has the necessary know-how for certain tasks within the escape room. Specific areas of responsibility and accountability are determined by the participants themselves on this basis at the beginning of the game. In the initial version of the escape room, a goal-oriented solution to the tasks (and thus the 'escape') succeeds on the basis of relationship-oriented communication, team action, knowledge communication, and knowledge sharing. In the foreground of the game life is the possibility to experiment in a protected space and to experience one's own strengths in order to open oneself in this way towards intercultural tasks, also outside of the escape room.[24]

24 After the cooperation in the escape room, a debriefing is offered in which the participants may reflect on the (intercultural, virtual) cooperation as well as their solution path and formulate expectations, but also "uneasy" feelings, regarding upcoming challenges of intercultural practice. As an option, target agreements for the following weeks are planned, which the participants formulate in the form of a "note to themselves" and hand over to the game leader in a sealed envelope. After an agreed period of time, they receive the envelope back unopened and are thus "teased" to reflect on their own development or to gather further learning experiences (on the next levels).

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In principle, an Educational Escape Room can be designed as a 'teaser' and a motivational tool for any subject area and discipline – and, if necessary, combined with intercultural challenges. It is conceivable, for example, that largely unknown fields of study, such as urban studies, can be thematically grasped in the game plot of an escape room and that interest in a more intensive engagement with the corresponding courses of study may be aroused.

Stage 2 in the intercultural scimification example outlined here does not necessarily require stage 1 in the chronology of the learning process but potential participants may certainly be encouraged by participation in the intercultural escape room, which may act as a 'teaser'.

The second stage focuses on the implementation of virtual intercultural strategy games – with the aim of engaging more intensively with challenges, such as the constructive handling of indeterminacy, multilingualism, time differences, and the negotiation of 'new normalities' or applying corresponding knowledge (for example acquired in stage 3).

Participants in the virtual intercultural strategy games "Megacities" and "Bilangon" – mentioned above and used in the context described here – consist of three university teams from three different countries. The university teams comprise of 5–20 participants and, ideally, each have a headquarters room at their university, "onsite".[25] The three teams meet once a week for 2–3 hours in video conferences over a period of 6 weeks to solve the common tasks of the strategy game.[26] The video conference meetings are supported by collaborative tools such as the whiteboard Miro.

The overarching strategy game case study consists of the transformation of a brownfield site of several hectares into an attractive and liveable area. The brownfield site is divided equally among the cities or regions of the universities participating in the game. The three strategy game teams represent their respective university region in the design task as consultants, where they do not take on a predefined role or simulate the situation, but act as consultants on the basis of their own professional and non-professional expertise. The expertise is made transparent to all participants at the beginning of the game, similar to the procedure described in the escape room. It is possible to recruit

25 With the discontinuation of face-to-face teaching due to the pandemic, the strategy games were no longer conducted in a blended learning format, but completely online.

26 If time differences, semester schedules, or holiday regulations of the participating universities do not allow for continuous meetings, the simulation games are held in a time-adjusted form, e.g. as a block seminar at the weekend.

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a limited number of members from other teams if a team lacks important expertise.[27]

Before the start of the joint planning game phase, the three consulting teams each draw up their own initial concepts for the redevelopment of the brownfield site. With a "cultural" self-conception of their objectives formulated in this way, the teams commence the collaborative phase of the game. The virtual wasteland, as well as the entire interaction scenario, become intercultural fields of action at this moment, as common rules of action remain initially largely undefined and developments in both the game and the group dynamics are difficult to predict.

In the course of the game, the aim is to collaboratively develop a common concept that is acceptable to all participants and, at the same time, does justice to the interests of the three regions. The three teams have to make a series of joint decisions and solve tasks in the individual rounds of the game (e.g. choice of language for the joint game phases; agreements on how to behave in undefined situations such as technical faults and team conflicts; elaboration of common guiding principles; a logo for the planning project; public relations; financial decisions, etc.). Most of the tasks are designed in a manner that requires collaborative and synergy-orientated work in order to find a solution.

The game is 'won' when the three teams succeed in creating common ecological, economic, social, and communicative 'infrastructures' in cross-team cooperation, allowing for a 'global' action scenario – characterized by sustainability – to emerge. On the other hand, the game is also about practising diversity in such a way that the ideas of the individual teams – further developed in the game – are realized in their regions and the members feel comfortable 'locally'.

Depending on the conference system used, the meetings are recorded by the system itself (Zoom, Teams) or via screencast and used at the beginning of the following meeting for an evaluation of the participants' intercultural interaction processes in the form of a debriefing: How do they deal with undefined situations? What are the strengths and weaknesses of collaborative working in individual cases? To what extent do they act and communicate in a relationship-oriented/perspective-reciprocal way?

27 As a rule, the recruitment process intensifies situations of uncertainty within the teams because, for example, multilingual action is taken right from the start and unfamiliar assumptions of thought and action may play a role.

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At this point, stage 2a offers the possibility of linking the conative and cognitive levels: In order to be able to deal more intensively with questions raised in the debriefing of the recordings, the participants are offered corresponding learning materials on the Moodle platform Glocal Campus. This includes specialist literature on diversity, intercultural team building or multilingualism research, wikis, videocasts and lectures on topics of intercultural cooperation, exchange forums, and peer-to-peer chats.

Since, similar to the escape rooms, the simulation games can be conceptually supplemented with subject-specific challenges in any weighting by adapting the framework story and the tasks (e.g. urban development, political science, tourism research, ecology, social sciences, etc.), the subject-related portfolios on the Glocal Campus expand accordingly. In this way, the strategy game materials are gradually 'rebuilt' with learning materials and specialist literature from different disciplines and countries – potentially, across many student generations. In addition, translations of the game materials into the common languages of the participating university countries and recordings of the strategy games (approved by the participants) are made accessible on the platform.

What is being realized in the current IVAC project context on the part of the seven participating countries, in the sense of the establishment of a foundation, may subsequently be developed further over generations of studies and students, and may initiate transdisciplinary research discourses. In this way, a "multi-paradigmatic sensitivity" (Grosskopf & Barmeyer, 2021) for international research cooperation can be promoted, in which it becomes possible to address currently dominant forms of cultural centrality in research and teaching perspectives and to test new ways of academic networking.

Stage 3 primarily refers to the level of cognitive competence development but is essentially aimed at developing an understanding of the systemic connection of the competence levels. The focus here is on supplementing the described teaching/learning and research materials of stage 2a, while also simultaneously engaging in an in-depth scientific examination of these materials.

The target groups are students and teachers, especially from intercultural disciplines, who are more intensively involved in general intercultural research. They may be interested, for example, in using strategy game recordings for analyses of intercultural discourse or intercultural action processes. This may be done individually or in the form of conventional courses. Ideally, this will lead to cross-university and cross-national cooperation, for example in the context of virtual seminar projects, lecture series, or research projects.

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The results of the cooperation become accessible on the Glocal Campus and can, thus, also flow into the further conception and design of the game offerings at stages 1 and 2 (and vice versa). Therefore 'science' and the game/application level are brought together and constitute an interdependent 'scimification' learning scenario that may potentially initiate the aforementioned "competence development" "as a circular movement" (Erpenbeck & Sauter, 2016, p. 112).

In order to be able to actually implement the holistic nature of the scimification approach in practice, it is necessary to a) address the described structural limitations of the competence levels vis-à-vis potential actors, and b) instigate corresponding dynamics and self-initiated learning momentum:

a) Participation in the escape room (stage 1) acts as a 'teaser' in relation to the interest or enthusiasm for certain subject-specific areas and should conclude with references to corresponding in-depth 'offers', such as participation in the strategy game (stage 2) or in certain courses at stage 3. Similarly, strategy games may be conducted in the sense of 'cross-sectional offers' with a primary game focus, but should, for example, also use debriefing phases in turn as teasers for more in-depth subject-specific offers of teaching materials (stage 2a or 3). Stage 3 teaching units such as lectures or seminars may specifically prepare for strategy games (stage 2), so that in any case a very concrete application of acquired knowledge is possible, and if interest is awakened for subject-specific deepening, feedback to stage 3 also takes place within the framework of, for example, further knowledge deepening (e.g. college courses, BA and MA theses).
b) In order to implement the mentioned circular cycle between the competence levels as a process, it is helpful to promote self-initiated momentum and dynamics. This can be achieved with the help of viral communication, e.g. via (former) participating actors; but it can also be designed in terms of the curriculum, as is the case with the IVAC projects.

In VIGIL the teachers from the participating universities initially accompany their teams in an organizational manner and participate rather passively in the debriefings of the strategy game management. Supported by the corresponding further materials on the Glocal Campus, after some time they should be in a position to conduct the first debriefings with their group themselves. If participants are interested in more in-depth training, they will be offered an online course "Debriefing of Intercultural Simulation Games" at stage 3, which is fol-

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lowed by a certificate and enables one to conduct complex debriefings independently. This in turn motivates you to independently acquire further partners in your own university networks and can generate a multiplier effect.

In the VEERIL project the self-initiated learning momentum is related to the product level: Teachers (here the participants of the VIGIL project) with experience in strategy games and good knowledge in the field of intercultural research and practice enter at level 3. They receive information on the objectives and design principles of Educational Escape Rooms and are asked to participate in an Educational Escape Room of their choice (if possible, in the country of their university location).

In a three-day "design thinking workshop" of the VEERIL project, the teachers then exchange their theoretical and practical experience. Supported by the project management, they jointly design and realize an intercultural virtual Educational Escape Room for stage 1 and conduct a trial run with their students. In this way, the students are introduced to the 'circular cycle' and at the same time – depending on their interests and courses of study – become motivated to take part in stage 2 and/or 3.

The teachers, in turn, have created a link between stages 3 and 1 for themselves by creating the escape room. By documenting the process of Educational Escape Room creation as part of their development work and by adding further theoretical or methodological-didactic materials on Educational Escape Room theory from their own particular research context, they establish a new feedback loop in relation to stage 3. In turn, the creation of an Educational Escape Room 'product' is a motivating factor to entice other teachers from their own university networks to participate in the escape room or in the creation of an escape room.

An essential factor for the creation of self-initiated momentum and dynamics within the scimification cycle is its curricular integration at the various universities. This is undoubtedly one of the greatest challenges for IVAC projects.

The aim, thus, is to create testing opportunities for the scimification approach. It remains to be seen whether, and how, this will impact the respective university teaching approach and whether it will indeed help create a 'new normal' in terms of university teaching, at least within individual areas.

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Intercultural Learning as an Interactional Achievement in a Digital Space

Milene Mendes de Oliveira and Mario Antonio Tuccillo

Abstract *Digital spaces offer individuals the opportunity to interact and connect with others, to engage with more perspectives, and to develop intercultural competence. In this chapter, we explore processes of learning and participation by newcomers in a team, pursuing the goal of becoming fully-fledged members of that community. We observed the behaviour of a team consisting of four students from a German university and two students from a Finnish university, all participating in a number of sessions of an online simulation game. Particular attention was given to the participation development of the two students from the Finnish university, positioned as newcomers in the already-established team from the German university. We describe interactional practices adopted by the two newcomers and by the other members which foster participation and inclusion. Our findings show two learning paths by the newcomers, one in which legitimate participation became connected with performing a specific role in the group and another in which participation meant sharing the interactional routines established in the team. This case study, based on successful experiences of a remote team, can shed light on the link between intercultural learning and interactional practices.*

Keywords *Intercultural Learning; Interaction; Participation; Interculturality*

1. Interculturality, Learning, and Participation

The intercultural communication literature is replete with descriptions of critical incidents (Spencer-Oatey, 2013), interactional mismatches (Gumperz, 1982), and communicative failure (Mendes de Oliveira, 2023) in intercultural encounters. There is also a vast literature on intercultural competence that describes the conditions under which this competence may be identified

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amongst actors (Rathje, 2007) or the characteristics of a so-called intercultural speaker (Byram, 2021). Additionally, there has been a growing interest in "intercultural learning", with most studies focusing on tools and final outcomes of instructed education (Çiftçi, 2016), thereby building frequently on nation-state-based notions of interculturality.

Relatively few empirical studies have focused on how exactly learning takes place in intercultural environments, i.e. studies that build on the microanalysis of interactional practices, and their changes in such settings (see Borghetti et al., 2015). In this chapter, we focus on how learning takes place through interaction in a series of Zoom meetings involving two previously established groups. The definition of learning in our case study leans on learning as participation, a paradigm that counters a view of learning as a cognitive process of knowledge transmission (Freire, 1996; Sfard, 1998). This is in line with Bennett's reflections (2012; see the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity) that posit the existence of different experiences of intercultural relations, from denial of cultural differences (Bennett adopts a broad definition of culture that goes beyond national cultures; see Grosskopf, 2023), at one end of a continuum, to integration, i.e. the expansion of one's self as including a broader repertoire of cultural worldviews (Bennett & Castiglioni, 2004, cited in Bennet, 2012), at the other end. According to Bennett, when integration takes place, people consciously construct "dynamic identities for themselves that acknowledge their primary socialization but […] extend who they are into alternative worldviews".[1]

As widely known, human beings participate in several collectives, each of which contain more or less conventionalized ways of thinking and acting. These ways of thinking and acting can be referred to as 'culture'. In this vein, Bolten (2015, p. 118) defines culturality as "familiar multiplicity" in recognition of the plurality of lifeworlds encompassed by the concept of culture. Thus, culturality denotes a condition in which individuals act within a known and familiar field of action; that is, they are familiar with the conventions – i.e. expectations of behaviours and moral judgments – used in the group and can easily understand communicative practices used by other individuals in that same field of action. By contrast, interculturality is characterized as "unfamiliar multiplicity" (from the German *unvertraute Vielfalt*) (Bolten, 2015, p.118) and is manifested when actors find themselves in a position where the frames of reference are unfamiliar (see Schütz, 1944) and cannot be grasped quickly.

1 This is in opposition to Bennett's own past and more static views of identity and self (e.g. Bennett, 1993).

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According to Bolten's theory, interculturality can be gradually transformed into culturality as the unfamiliar becomes progressively familiar and routines of thought and action begin to emerge (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

A framework presumably able to explain how interculturality is transformed into culturality is Lave and Wenger's Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP). This is a framework that describes learning as a social phenomenon that leans on participation in certain communities of practice. It describes the processes experienced by newcomers in their attempt to become members and eventually old-timers in these communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Becoming a member of a community is a gradually evolving process that entails a newcomer participating first in simple but still meaningful tasks in the community, and through these interactions, developing an understanding of and participating more actively in the practices in this same community. As time goes by and participation evolves, newcomers eventually become old-timers. As for the power relations between old-timers and newcomers, the former have the power to confer legitimacy to the latter and to control their access to sets of practices and experiences within the group.

In connection to their case studies on apprentices in communities of practice, Lave and Wenger state that:

> Newcomers' legitimate peripherality provides them with more than an "observational" lookout post: It crucially involves participation as a way of learning – of both absorbing and being absorbed in – the "culture of practice". An extended period of legitimate peripherality provides learners with opportunities to make the culture of practice theirs. From a broadly peripheral perspective, apprentices gradually assemble a general idea of what constitutes the practice of the community. This uneven sketch of the enterprise (available if there is legitimate access) might include who is involved; what they do; what everyday life is like; how masters talk, walk, work, and generally conduct their lives; how people who are not part of the community of practice interact with it; what other learners are doing; and what learners need to learn to become full practitioners. It includes an increasing understanding of how, when, and about what old-timers collaborate, collude, and collide, and what they enjoy, dislike, respect, and admire. In particular, it offers exemplars (which are grounds and motivation for learning activity), including

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> masters, finished products, and more advanced apprentices in the process of becoming full practitioners. (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p. 95)[2]

The notion of participation has also received attention from scholars interested in the micro-analysis of social interaction. Even though the procedures for allocating turns in conversations (Sacks et al., 1974; see section 2 below) do not favour any particular participant, in actual conversations (especially institutional ones), rights to speakership are not equally shared (Drew, 1991, p. 21–22). An early and empirical study is analysis by Erickson and Shultz's (1982) of counselling sessions in junior colleges in the USA. Amongst other aspects, they show how differing listening responses by students and counsellors and a mismatch in the use of cues by white teachers and African American students can lead to conversational trouble. In a study on participation structures in classrooms, Philips (1983) also investigated student-teacher interaction and their allocation of turns and learned that there is a major mismatch between participation at home, where learning follows observation in community activities, and school, which fosters separation between individuals. The use of bodily and prosodic cues has been observed by Goodwin & Goodwin (2005) in their analysis of how a man with aphasia manages to position himself as a ratified participant in the conversation. Their contribution set forth theoretical and methodological foundations for the multimodal conversation analysis[3] of participation. In a similar vein, in a recent study on decision making in mental health settings, Weiste et al. (2020, p. 2) called attention to the fact that participation presupposes social interaction, "which in return requires the capacity to coordinate with and make sense of each other's actions."

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2 Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 37) explain that periphery is a positive term: "Full participation, [...] stands in contrast to only one aspect of the concept of peripherality as we see it: It places the emphasis on what partial participation is not, or not yet. In our usage, peripherality is also a positive term, whose most salient conceptual antonyms are unrelatedness or irrelevance to ongoing activity. The partial participation of newcomers is by no means "disconnected" from the practice of interest. Furthermore, it is also a dynamic concept. In this sense, peripherality, when it is enabled, suggests an opening, a way of gaining access to sources for understanding through growing involvement. The ambiguity inherent in peripheral participation must then be connected to issues of legitimacy, of the social organization of and control over resources, if it is to gain its full analytical potential".

3 Multimodal Conversation Analysis takes into consideration different modalities employed in the interaction, both verbal and non-verbal, i.e. eye gaze, speaking activity, facial expression, body movement, and hand movement (Penzkofer et al., 2021).

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In keeping up with the aforementioned notions of learning and participation, in this chapter, we aim to answer the following research question: "How does learning through participation take place in a newly established online group?" We are especially interested in investigating whether processes of intercultural learning follow the patterns described in the LPP framework presented above. Thus, we investigate how the participation of new members is achieved interactionally in online exchanges via Zoom and his this reflected upon by participants themselves in journal entries written after the online sessions.

2. Dataset & Methods

This study is based on the observation and analysis of data extracted from the virtual intercultural game "Megacities" (Bolten 2015). The script of the game involves a large piece of land ("Wasteland") which three neighbouring cities will inherit from a wealthy senior citizen under one condition: The cities must cooperatively develop a plan on how to use the land that is profitable for all three parties. The students participating in the game considered in our study met for five Zoom sessions – which from now on will be respectively called round one (the "Kick-off session"), two, three, four, and five (the final session). After being assigned to the different cities, in round one, each team has to come up with characteristics for their city (e.g. name of the city and its socio-economic strengths and limits), as well as the role each participant will cover throughout the game (e.g. moderator, presenter, etc.). After this initial phase, the teams are to exchange ideas and devise a plan on how to use the wasteland that will be submitted to the senior citizen. The participants are students who, at the moment of the game, live in different countries, study at different universities, and have different linguistic backgrounds. The language chosen for communication amongst the participants of the game is English as a Lingua Franca. None of the members is a native speaker of English.

The data used in the context of this study comprise video recordings from round one, round two, and round five of one of the teams. Automatically generated transcripts from these Zoom meetings were used for an initial appraisal of the instances which needed to be isolated and analyzed. Such cases were then transcribed according to the conversation analytic transcription system GAT2 (*Gesprächsanalytisches Transkriptionssystem*, "discourse and conversation-analytic transcription system") with conventions to notate the wording and the

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prosodic features of naturally occurring interactions (Selting et al., 2011). In some of the excerpts transcribed, it was necessary to consider the multimodal features and other means of communication employed by some of the members. These include gazes and gestures, which contribute to the interaction and convey specific messages. A third sample of primary data collected for our observations consists of the learning journal entries which were submitted by each student at the end of every round: In these, the participants shared their impressions on the teamwork and what they learned during the session.

The team selected for our analysis is City Three from a game which took place during the Winter Semester 2021/22. The members were students from a German and a Finnish university which were respectively acquainted with peers from their own institution, but not with those from the other university. City Three of this game consisted of two students from the Finnish university and four from the German institution. The focus of our analysis lies on the participation patterns of the two students from the Finnish university, namely Sakke and Helmi (the real names of the participants were replaced with pseudonyms). Figure 1 shows the members of City Three, with their respective pseudonyms and the acronyms "GU" and "FU" which stand for "German university" and "Finnish university", according to the institution they are enrolled at.

Fig.1: Screenshot of the Team Members of City Three.

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While the analysis of the learning journal entries leaned on the method of inductive qualitative analysis (Thomas, 2006, p. 238), the analysis of interactions that follows is based on conversation analytic methods (Sidnell, 2010). Specifically, we focused on participation features from a multimodal perspective (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2005). This perspective considers the foundational conversation analytic notions of (a) turn-taking and speaker selection (Sacks et al., 1974), (b) preferred and dispreferred responses (Pomerantz, 1984), as well as (c) displays of alignment (Stivers et al, 2011). These concepts are explained hereinafter.

The turn-taking and speaker selection system is at the heart of Conversation Analysis and describes how speaker allocation follows a set of clear operations in dyads or multi-party conversations (Liddicoat, 2007). According to this system, there is a general orientation towards the norm of one-speaker-at-a-time in conversations. Despite this general characteristic, overlaps and long silences routinely occur in communicative interactions. Both phenomena may be considered interactionally significant in the course of a conversation, and people often orient towards them as potentially problematic. Hence, when they occur, they are generally handled as phenomena in need of repair. Within the system, speaker allocation usually follows a pattern according to which the current speaker selects the speaker of the next conversational turn (e.g. by asking "*Sarah*, what time is it?", the current speaker is selecting Sarah as the next speaker). In situations where the current speaker does not select the next one in a multi-party conversation, the next speaker may self-select (e.g. someone answering, "it's four o'clock" to the question "does anyone have the time?"). Alternatively, the current speaker may choose to take the next turn (e.g. "what time is it, guys?" (silence) "Livia, can you tell me the time, please?"). In the latter situation, the speaker orients to the silence as potentially problematic and, instead of waiting for conversational partners to self-select, they decided to select the next speaker explicitly (Livia, in the example).

The concept of *preference* used in the analysis of interaction "does not refer to personal desires of the speakers but rather to the recurrent patterns of talk in which actions are carried out" (Liddicoat, 2007, p. 110–111). In short, dispreferred actions are actions that are avoided or delayed in their production (such as invitation declines being preceded by long pauses and tokens such as 'hm' or 'well'). Preferred responses, such as the acceptance of an invitation, are usually performed directly with little or no delay.

Displays of alignment are a broader notion and can comprise turn allocation and preference practices. Stivers et al. (2011, p. 21) has explained align-

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ment in the following way: "Aligning responses cooperate by facilitating the proposed activity or sequence; accepting the presuppositions and terms of the proposed action or activity; and matching the formal design preference of the turn." Thus, alignment can be broadly defined as interactional practices that display cooperation with the conversational partner(s).

3. Analysis: Learning and Participation as an Interactional Achievement

In this section of the chapter, we depict the analysis of interactional sequences that showcase changes in communicative practices, which, in turn, point to how learning happens within the newly established online social environment. The analysis of such interactional sequences will be complemented by excerpts from the players' learning journals where they report how they themselves perceived the participation patterns in the game rounds. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 are centred upon the two students from the Finnish institution, Sakke and Helmi.

Sakke

Right after round 1 of the game, Sakke writes the following: "Currently I feel a bit overwhelmed when I would have to interrupt someone else while they are speaking." By contrast, after the final session of the game, he reports the following: "The biggest improvement when thinking about my own ways of working in group projects is that I do not need to be so 'afraid' of other people and I just can bring forth my own ideas and opinions more bravely. What I would still change is that I could have started talking more earlier but as I said, that improved during this project." In contrast to his fellow player Helmi (section 3.2 below), Sakke's speaking rate does not vary significatively from round one to round five of the game.

The first excerpt reproduced below has been selected from round one of the game. During the meeting, the group was asked to create a name for their city. Following this task, each of the participants had to pick up one of the proposed roles and/or skills they would like to be responsible for in the remaining sessions of the game (e.g. presentations, negotiations, management of virtual tools). Besides that, the participants were given the possibility to add additional roles which would be considered important for the game. The excerpt has been extracted from this latter phase of the discussion, namely that of the

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addition of new possible roles. After the common decision of a name for their city and the assignment of the pre-set roles, Klaus asks the group whether there is any other role/skill which could be included in the list. Given his position as a moderator, Klaus is the person in the group who most frequently elicits his peers' contributions in the discussions. For this reason, the assignment of the next speaker within the group is strongly dependent on Klaus' moderation.

Excerpt (1) – Further ideas (Round 1, 00:16:39-00:17:18)

```
01  KlausGU   °h all right
02            anything we want to add on our own (-)
03            helmi (-) sakke (.) any ideas for <<len> an> additional role (.)
04            [(we're ha- (.) havin-)]
05  LukasGU   [     or maybe (.) some]thing (.)
06            you wanna: uhm (1.8)
07            you wanna dive <<len> into>
08            (1.8 sec)
09  HelmiFU   mh (---) <<len> i don't have any: further (.) ideas h°>
10            (1.7 sec)
11  PetraGU   ((click)) °h=
12  SakkeFU   =well=
13  PetraGU   =maybe we would need someone who will communicate
14            with the: members of the other cities (--)
15                                      °h [uhm: ]
16  KlausGU   ((with a doubtful expression)) [isn't] that negotiation
17  LukasGU   th- yeah <<f> that would be you:>
18            (0.7 sec)
19  KlausGU   i can join you if you don't want to do it alone petra=
20  PetraGU   =<<len> yeah> (.)
21            (if) i don't know if there's a role for this i mean
```

At first, Klaus elicits participation by the group by asking the other players about possible additional points for the assignment of roles they did not discuss or consider during the previous phase of the discussion. In doing so, he uses an inclusive "we" (line 02, *anything we want to add on your own?*). What follows is a silence in which the rest of the participants refrain from taking the floor. Klaus orients to the silence as potentially problematic and reframes the previous broad question (line 03, *Helmi, Sakke, any ideas for an additional role?*). He replaces "we" with the specific vocative "Hemmi, Sakke" and specifies the content of the question, from "anything" to "any ideas for an additional role." In overlap with Klaus' turn, Lukas orients his turn to the two students from the Finnish university to ask whether they would be interested in any role, also including the specific ones already discussed (lines 05–07, *or maybe something you wanna dive into?*). This general orientation towards the inclusion of the team members from the Finnish university can also be seen in Klaus' learning jour-

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nal, which states: "I would have liked to involve the Finnish students even more as they face a somewhat difficult situation as all of us German students know each other quite good by now."

After the questions posed by his teammates in lines 02–03 and 05–07, Sakke gives bodily signals of thinking, through eye gaze, specifically by looking up and facing back and forth the two screens he is working with (presumably one for the collaborative board and the other one for the Zoom meeting). These signals seem to point to the intention to say something and the fact that he is trying to detect a transition-relevant place[4] in order to start a new turn in the conversation. As soon as Helmi starts her turn (line 09), Sakke appears to be opening his microphone. At the moment in which he produces the turn-initial item "well" (Heritage, 2015), Petra starts her turn (lines 13–15). Thus, Sakke's attempt to take the floor is not ratified by Petra nor by the rest of the group, and Sakke gives up joining the conversation, which moves slightly in another direction. Petra continues her turn without hesitating, in spite of the latching (i.e. "the absence […] of the beat of silence which commonly occurs between turns", Schegloff, 1986, p. 114) with Sakke's "well" (lines 12–13). Here, it is not possible to state with certainty whether Petra did not hear Sakke talking or if she already interpreted the content of Sakke's turn as similar to Helmi's previous dispreferred response (line 09, *I don't have any further ideas*). Note that "well" is often a hesitation marker preceding dispreferred (i.e. a disagreement or a rejection which misaligns with the prior turn) responses.

The second extract took place in the second round of the game. The group discusses the characteristics and the concept of the imaginary city they are representing. Once again, Klaus selects the next speaker by calling out Sakke's name and orienting a question directly to him on his willingness to add any detail to what the rest of the group has already discussed.

Sakke's response to Klaus' question starts with "uhm" (line 13), so once again with a filler which might indicate a state of uncertainty and the projection of a dispreferred answer. The delay with which his reaction comes (line 12) is another indication of a dispreferred answer. On the other hand, his reaction, together with the facial expressions and gaze movement (lines 07, 09, 11–13), are embodied displays of "doing thinking," showing his involvement in the joint interactional activity (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1986). What follows

4 A transition-relevant place is the span that "begins with the imminence of possible completion" of a turn-in-progress. The transition to a next speaker must not necessarily occur at this place, but it becomes "possibly relevant there." (Schegloff, 2007, p. 4)

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is the use of a doubled token "well, well" (line 15), which, besides signalling the non-straightforwardness in responding – also to gain time for his answer (Schegloff & Lerner, 2009) – projects a sarcastic tone to Sakke's answer. The "well, well" used by him, in fact, is an intertextual element that refers to other discourses, especially the ones circulating on the internet through memes (see Figure 2 below). This type of intertextual element might be used to position the speaker (Internet-user), sarcastically, as an expert making a judgement they are entitled to (on entitlement, see Asmuß & Oshima, 2018). Klaus orients to the sarcastic tone and laughs after Sakke's uttering this prefacing-token (line 17).

Excerpt (2) – Well, well (Round 2, 00:13:11-00:14:57)

```
01  KlausGU   [yeah (.)           ]
02  SakkeFU   [((looks at camera))]
03  KlausGU   [and                          ] then (.) later on
04  SakkeFU   [((looks back at other screen))]
05  KlausGU   we can (.) categorize (-)
06            °h so uh maybe: (.)
07  SakkeFU   ((turns to the camera))
08  KlausGU   sakke: (.) [any ideas                    ] (.)
09  SakkeFU              [((turns back to other screen))]
10  KlausGU   what would you [like to see in our beautiful city]
11  SakkeFU                  [((looks again to the camera))    ]
12            (2.3 sec) ((Sakke looks down, then up again))
13  SakkeFU   ((looks back to the other screen)) uhm::
14            (1.2 sec)
15  SakkeFU   ((click)) well well
16            (2.1 sec)
17  KlausGU   ((laughs))
18  SakkeFU   ((click)) i'm looki- looking at the: (.)
19            what info we have <<len> like uhm> (.)
20            the city has the national champions in the field hockey so
21            °h ((turns to the camera)) maybe something more to do with
22            sports like
23            ((looks down)) i would (.) like to see this becoming:
24            sort of a: (-) ((faces the camera, then the other screen, then
25            the camera)) s- sports city as well (-)
26            since (--) we already have a good team here
27  KlausGU   yeah [of course]
28  SakkeFU        [and:     ] ((faces the other screen)) i thin- i think-
29            h° (1.1) we have enough (-) <<len> population for> (.) for more
30            than ((turns to the camera)) a one <<giggling> one team> (.)
31            for (.) ((turns to other screen)) considering (.) fan (.) base
32            (1.4 sec)
```

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```
33  KlausGU   oh that's a good ₁[idea                ]₁
34  SakkeFU                    ₁[((faces the camera))]₁
35  KlausGU   so uhm (.) first ₂[of all              ]₂ (.)
36  SakkeFU                    ₂[((faces the screen))]₂
37  KlausGU   we have a large and extensive network of bicycle lanes so: (.)
38            goes well with the [sport theme for     our      ] city (.)
39  SakkeFU                      [((faces the camera and nods))]
40            ((faces other screen))
41  KlausGU   so how about we [do like         ] (.)
42  SakkeFU                  [((faces camera))]
43  KlausGU   we have two major teams for field hockey (.)
44  SakkeFU   ((faces other screen))
45  KlausGU   and they're rivals
46            (1.0 sec)
47  SakkeFU   sure
48  KlausGU   and we have a northern team and a southern team for our city:
49  SakkeFU   ((faces camera))
50  KlausGU   they're rivals they hate each other (.) uhm
51  SakkeFU   ((chuckles and nods))
52  KlausGU   there are a lot of hooligans (.) who drink a lot of wine and
53            then (.) i don't know (-) [(xxx xxx)            ]
54  SakkeFU                           [((faces other screen))]
55            (2.3 sec)
56  SakkeFU   ((faces camera))
57  KlausGU   [okay]
58  SakkeFU   [yeah]
59            (0.5 sec)
60  SakkeFU   ((turns to the camera)) [should i create]
61  KlausGU                           [sounds fun     ]
62  SakkeFU   a sticky note or something
63  KlausGU   (.) °h yeah sure (.) [go ahead]
64  SakkeFU                        [since   ] i- i guess i'm sort of the:
65            °h (.) like you know ((giggles)) (1.0)
66            the zoom and ((click)) (1.0)
67            miro guy (-) uh:: (2.5) okay ((click)) °h (1.9)
68            <<len> so:>
```

After an initial pre-explanation of his assessment, Sakke uses the exact same structure (line 23, *I would like to see…*) as the one used by Klaus for his question (line 10, *what would you like to see…?*). After that, it is possible to identify a progressive display of affiliation between Sakke and Klaus, beginning with the alignment of the team moderator by agreeing (line 27, *yeah of course*) and with an assessment (line 33, *oh that's a good idea*), and then with his enthusiastic elaboration of Sakke's proposal by adding new features to it (starting in line 35 and finishing in line 53). Sakke, who, before that moment, seldom explicitly displayed alignment in other cases of group discussions, appears to feel entitled to give clear signs of support to Klaus' ideas, as this confers legitimacy to his own initial idea. Examples of evidence suggesting alignment include the nodding (line 39), the use of an agreement token as a continuer/backchanneling (line 47, *sure*), and the chuckle (line 51). The latter of these signals shows another level

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of intersubjectivity: Sakke displays understanding and affiliation by "sharing" Klaus' smile, approving of his rather funny ideas. In the conversation-analytic literature, smiles have been described as invitations for the others to share the laughter (Jefferson, 1979).

Fig. 2: Willy Wonka Sarcasm Meme

(Meme Generator, 2020)

At the end of the exchange, Sakke makes his role in the group relevant: He is the person in charge of – or entitled to (Asmuß & Oshima, 2018) – the management of the virtual collaboration (lines 64–68, *I'm sort of the Zoom and Miro guy*).

This analysis shows that a member's behaviour requires the detailed consideration of behaviours by others as well. Thus, such an interactional perspective stresses that participation is a product of practices used by the group, which complicates accounts of participation solely based on e.g., word-count, number of turns, or even perceptions of participation (as raised in interview or survey studies of intercultural groups). Such measures would therefore neither be able to account for participation nor intercultural learning.

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Helmi

A different manifestation of the processes of change in the participation style as well as a progression in the adoption of a variety of conversational strategies throughout the game are to be found in the case of the second student from the Finnish university, Helmi.

Her rate of engagement seems to be higher than that of the others at the beginning of the game (that is, during round one). On this occasion, she is the participant who, for instance, is the keenest to answer questions asked by one of the peers to the whole team (even when the answer is solely: *I don't have any further ideas,* as in line 9 in excerpt 1 above), to backchannel during group discussions, and to deliver positive and supportive feedback to others. In transition-relevant places, she often self-selects as the next speaker and uses tokens such as *yeah, that's a good idea*; *that sounds cool*; and *that sounds like an interesting subject*. Moreover, she shares additional ideas to what has been said in group discussions, even when not being directly called to talk. A similar behaviour should not be surprising when taking into consideration what she documents in her journal. After the first meeting of the group, she writes that she is "delighted at how easy-going and talkative [her] German team members [are]" and opposes this to her experiences in her home university, where students are usually "a bit reluctant to get started in teamwork". Similar situations often drive her to cover a managing and moderating role when working with peers from her university, as reported in her journal entry: "[with students from the home university] I have got used to taking a leading and managing role, which has sometimes felt almost a responsibility." Nonetheless, the presence of someone else in the team taking the moderating role pleases Helmi, who documents in the journal entry "[…] today there clearly was someone else in our group doing that, which I felt as a great relief." In the same entry, she carries out some self-criticism on her turn-taking style, claiming that "[…] something [she] would do in a different way would be to listen to others more instead of talking" and that "[she] may have talked over people or said unnecessary things." Noticeable consequences of this critique are found during round two of the game: Here, we identified a number of cases in which she abandons her attempts to take turns as well as cases in which she speaks exclusively when directly spurred to talk, which results in a lack of propensity to compete for the floor. Besides, during this session of the game (round two), the turn-taking style of the peers from the German university stands out: They continuously overlap, actively participate in discussions, and use a quite ironic tone. In this context, Helmi seems to

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learn the participation dynamics and the communicative style from the "old-timers" by observing them and, at first, refraining from talking ("listen[ing] instead of talking", as documented in her learning journal). In his definition of experiences in intercultural processes, Bennett (2012) explains that before integration – thus, expansion of one's world view – is reached, actors often take a self-reflexive stance that allows them to see others' actions and behaviours as different from their own, thereby expanding their repertoire of worldviews.

When considering the fifth (and final) session of the game, a conspicuous change in Helmi's participation style – in terms of turn-taking patterns, joking style as well as her participation rate – can be identified when compared to round two. The most crucial change in the turn-taking style during the session is the high rate of cases in which she jumps into the discussion without being directly spurred to talk, at some points even in overlap with other members' contributions. The following excerpt illustrates this finding. It was taken from a task in which the players reflect upon their behaviour and communication style during the game.

Jakob shares his opinion on the communication (turn-taking) style the members of their group adopted when meeting with others (lines 01–03, *most of the time we don't really care if we are […] more or less jumping in and interrupting each other as long as we are all cool with it,* and lines 05–07, *but I feel like the other groups might have done that a bit different, I don't know*). Jakob and Helmi keep on talking and competing for the floor, and a series of overlaps occur in a very short lapse of time (lines 08–18). Ironically enough and not intentionally, this set of overlaps happens right at the moment in which the members are engaged in a meta-communicative discussion led by the topic of the task: Jakob points out that they constantly interrupt each other (lines 01–03). This caused not only Jakob and Helmi but also the other peers to laugh at the dense exchange of turns (line 16). This is also clear by Helmi's question (line 17, *did I interrupt you?*), which is an evident reference to what has been said by Jakob (lines 01–02, *we don't really care if we are like jumping in and interrupting each other*). What is striking here is that, differently than what happened in the previous analyzed sessions, Helmi does not hold back from talking when another participant is occupying the floor but rather jumps into the conversation (in an overlapping position), keeps talking although the other participant has still not completed their turn, and only stops her sequence when explicitly asked to let that person finish (line 14, *let me quickly finish*). This evidence of a shared way of communicating within the group shows that the newcomer, Helmi, has become more outspoken during team activities, similarly to her peers. Further

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evidence for her growing outspokenness is the fact that the initial self-critique carried out after the kick-off session does not emerge in the final entry of the learning journal: Here, instead, she explains how "more outgoing, active and relaxed" she has become. In the journal, she also engages in explicit remarks on the whole team's communication culture by saying how it was "relaxed and informal" and how the members could "quickly and easily […] adapt to other's communicative culture in interaction" – i.e. to the members who were already acquainted with each other and already shared a communication culture (the group of "old-timers").

Excerpt (3) – Did I interrupt you? (Round 5, 00:07:44 - 00:08:06)

```
01  JakobGU   most of the time we don't really care if we are (.) like
02            more or less jumping in: and (.) interrupting
03            [each other as long (.) as we are all cool with it]
04  HelmiFU   [((opens mouth as to utter something, nods))      ]
05  JakobGU   °h but i feel <<chuckling> like the other groups> might have
06            done that a bit different (.)
07            i don't know
08            °h [i mean i'v ]
09  HelmiFU      [yeah and i-] think (.) yeah [what i wrote about] my
10            ((looks up))
11  JakobGU                                    [also (wrote) the- ]
12                           [ehm  ]
13  HelmiFU   ((looks at Jakob)) [uh s-] sorry
14  JakobGU    let me [quick finish]
15  HelmiFU           [yeah go     ] ahead
16            ((Klaus laughs loudly in the background))
17  HelmiFU   [did i interrupt you] ((laughs))
18  JakobGU   [uhm we wrote       ] down that we had those roles
19            in the very first kickoff session right
```

4. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

Throughout our analyses of Sakke and Helmi's participation patterns in the game, we had the following research question in mind: "How does learning through participation take place in a newly established online group?" Our reflections were guided by Lave and Wenger's (1991) LPP which considers learning a social phenomenon related to membership in communities of practice. Our analyses demonstrate that the LPP framework does provide an adequate starting point to understand learning processes by newcomers in groups. We showed, for instance, how Helmi's interactional practices confirm that the player was able to first take up and later go beyond the observational lookout

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post connected to peripherality in the group. Her case is indeed illustrative of peripherality changing into legitimate access: By observing and reflecting upon the interactions in the group, she was able to get an understanding of how to operate in the group and to later position herself centrally in group discussions and decisions. In Sakke's case, legitimate access was shown to be less a matter of emulating the existing speaking styles of old-timers; instead, his access and fully-fledged membership was enacted in relation to his role in the group (as the person responsible for Zoom and the shared virtual boards). This latter point can be connected to the very use of digital tools as affordances of participation in virtual settings. For instance, in Conti et al. (2022, p. 199), players of the same intercultural game (Megacities) reported that virtual tools "enabled everyone's involvement despite language barriers and insecurities" and allowed them "to convey their opinions and ideas in the written format."

Thus, Helmi and Sakke seem to follow different learning paths. While Sakke's overall participation rate, as per the number of words and turns, did not vary much during the sessions, the quality of his participation changed, with sequences evidencing engagement with teammates and participation in key game decisions. For Helmi, the interactional practices changed substantially in comparison with Sakke. The analysis of her learning journal entries helps us understand why: She suddenly became aware of interactional practices that are usually taken for granted in everyday conversations, a process of self-awareness and self-reflection connected to interculturality (Bennett, 2012). At the end of the game, both her journal entry and her interactional practices show how comfortable she is with the interactional routines (Schmidt and Deppermann, 2023) of the group.

In our analysis, it became clear that Sakke and Helmi's contributions were facilitated in several moments by members of the German university (such as Klaus and Lukas), who showed an orientation toward the inclusion of the members of the Finnish institution, both in the learning journal and through interactional moves in the game. Overall, the styles and remarks of the members of the German university unveil that these players already had a shared communication culture which had been established prior to the game. These players, thus, orient to Sakke and Helmi as newcomers confronted with interculturality and in need of a 'helping hand' to become fully integrated into the team (which goes along with how Sakke and Helmi position themselves in the group as evi-

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denced in their learning journals).[5] These findings confirm that the capacity to coordinate and make sense of each other's actions is at the core of the participation dynamics in a team (Weiste et al., 2020). They, moreover, demonstrate the multimodal character of participation, which is manifested not only in verbal language but also in laughter and facial expressions (Goodwin & Goodwin, 2005).

Our answer to the research question of the case study corroborates a view of learning as a fully social rather than a solely individual process. Thus, investigating Sakke and Helmi's learning processes independently without taking a holistic view of all participants and actions within the sequence would invariably lead to an incomplete picture of the situation. In fact, a complete view of learning will necessarily need to take the trajectory of the group as a whole into account. In this connection, it is important to acknowledge that this is a limitation of the present study: By focusing on Sakke and Helmi's learning trajectories, we needed to leave behind the descriptions of other potentially meaningful practices including a practice introduced by Helmi that was emulated by the group from the German university, i.e. the use of self-deprecating jokes. This finding indeed complicates the application of the LPP, which does not account for old-timers adopting newcomers' practices, since the former are, according to the framework, the ones retaining the power to confer legitimacy to the latter and to control their access to sets of practices and experiences within the group. Thus, while the LPP does describe much of what we found in the data, it cannot account for all processes found within the group.

We find that the magnifying-glass effect provided by the micro-analysis of interaction coupled with the analysis of the learning journal shows the contingencies of the learning process in intercultural groups. These are relevant points for a more situated view of 'intercultural learning,' which should account for the development of interactional histories of actors and groups in situations of interculturality.

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5 Even though we have, throughout the chapter, avoided reflections of cultural dimensions of national groups, it is interesting (not least to defy stereotypes) that the group from the German institution (in which most of the participants report to be of German nationality) displays a style that goes counter several descriptions of German cultural dimensions in which German nationals are claimed to appear "humourless" to some other national cultures (Lewis, 2006, p. 227) and smiling is described as being reserved for friends (Lewis, 2006, p. 229).

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Appendix: Conventions used in the transcripts (GAT2)

[ ]	overlapping talk
₁[ ]₁	overlapping segments belonging to each other
(.)	micro pause, up to 0.2 sec duration
(-)	short pause of ca. 0.2-0.5 sec duration
(--)	intermediate pause of ca. 0.5-0.8 sec duration
(--)	longer pause of ca. 0.8-1.0 sec duration
(2.3)	timed pause of 2.3 sec duration
well=	latched utterances
=maybe	
((laughs))	non-linguistic actions, transcriber's comment
°h	audible inbreath of ca. 0.2-0.5 sec duration
h°	audible outbreath of ca. 0.2-0.5 sec duration
:	lengthened sound or syllable of ca. 0.2-0.5 sec
::	lengthened sound or syllable of ca. 0.5-0.8 sec
thin-	cut-off word
<<len> >	speech tempo change, lento (slow)
<<f> >	speech loudness change, forte (loud)
<<giggling> >	non-linguistic actions, with indication of scope
(if)	uncertain hearing
(xxx)	unintelligible hearing

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Learning About Colonialism by Scrolling?

The Twitter Thread as Lifewide Textual Offer and Cosmopolitan Potentiality

Fergal Lenehan

Abstract *It is here argued that lifewide learning possibilities may also be viewed in relation to social media, not least the platform Twitter, recently rebranded as X, and the Twitter/X thread; a number of tweets threaded together to form a longer text which is then communicated to, often, a large number of people. Twitter threads may be seen as a lifewide textual offer containing cosmopolitan potentiality, meaning here the potential for a transformation in perspective due to contact with others on global issues, as envisioned by Delanty (2008). It is also argued that the Twitter/X thread functions as a type of social media genre, and three specific types of thread are here analyzed: 1) a collectively created type of thread which looks for contributions from numerous followers on Twitter/X, creating a multi-agent text; 2) an individually-created, 'closed' and usually numbered thread; and 3) an individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, to which other tweets may be added at any time. Twitter threads from the curated Indigenous Australian account @IndigenousX, the British-Irish academic Katy Hayward and Irish historian Liam Hogan are analyzed as lifewide textual offers containing cosmopolitan potentiality. The global issue at the centre of all three threads – and accounts – are the contemporary consequences of European colonialism.*

Keywords *Twitter/X; Cosmopolitanism; Colonialism; Brexit; Slavery*

1. Introduction

The concept of lifewide learning presents various facets of everyday life as imbued with learning possibilities, as containing the potentiality for informal, holistic and 'unmapped' forms of learning. It is here argued that lifewide learn-

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ing possibilities may also be viewed in relation to social media, not least the platform Twitter/X and the Twitter/X thread; a number of tweets threaded together to form a longer text which is then communicated to, often, a large number of people. Twitter/X threads may be seen as a lifewide textual offer containing cosmopolitan potentiality, meaning here the potential for a transformation in perspective due to contact with others on global issues, as envisioned by Delanty (2008). It is also argued that the Twitter/X thread functions as a type of social media genre, and three specific types of thread are here analyzed: Twitter/X threads from the curated Indigenous Australian account @IndigenousX, the British-Irish academic Katy Hayward, and Irish historian Liam Hogan may be seen, it is argued, as lifewide textual offers containing cosmopolitan potentiality. The global issue at the centre of all three threads – and accounts – are the contemporary consequences of European colonialism. The accounts were initially analyzed due to their educational content and, subsequently, conceptualizations of digital textual genre were formulated. The accounts were analyzed from the methodological and literary-oriented perspective of digital hermeneutics (Gerbaudo, 2016; Sadler, 2021) and aphorism as literary form, as well as digital communicative genre as part of emerging online norms (Blommaert, 2018).

2. The Learning Context: Twitter/X, Lifewide Learning, Cosmopolitanism and the Twitter/X Thread as Digital Communicative Genre

Twitter and Education Research

Founded in the US in 2006, the online platform Twitter had acquired 313 million monthly users by 2016, including large and active populations of users outside of the English-speaking world, such as in Japan, India, Indonesia and Brazil (Burgess & Baym, 2020, p. 3). Indeed, as a social platform it has garnered a rather elite reputation. Burgess and Baym (2020) suggest that "many journalists, academics, and politicians are virtually dependent on it as a social listening, professional dialogue, and public relations tool" (p. 4). Despite the existence of several well-known far-right tweeters, and the re-establishment of various far-right accounts following Elon Musk's acquirement of the microblogging site in late 2022 and the subsequent rebranding as X in mid-2023, American-centred research suggests the platform attracts, in the US at least,

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a disproportionate amount of liberal, young and well-educated individuals who generally vote for the Democratic Party (Wojcik & Hughes, 2019). Since the platform is of course relatively new, research on Twitter is also a relatively new phenomenon, with various orientations, such as, for example, research on the platform's relationship to media agenda-setting (e.g. Vasterman, 2018 and Abdi-Herrle, 2018), Twitter's influence on electoral politics (e.g. Galdieri et al., 2018 and Kamps, 2020), its interconnections with street protests (e.g. Gerbaudo, 2012 and Dang-Anh, 2019), and Twitter as a performance space for the creation of an online persona (e.g. De Kosnik & Feldman, 2019 and Burrough, 2016).

Twitter has also been extensively investigated from the perspective of learning and education research, especially in relation to the third-level educational context (Ricoy, 2016). Malik et al. (2019) have conducted a review of 1,313 anglophone academic articles written on the subject of Twitter and education between the years 2007 and 2017. The authors conclude that 80.6 % of the articles that they found deal with higher education; 9.7 % with the context of secondary schools; 3.9 % are categorized as dealing with online surveys; 2.9 % with academic conferences, while 2.9 % of the articles analyzed are regarded as having a miscellaneous educational institute as their principal topic (pp. 5–6). What is interesting here, from my perspective, is that *informal* situations of learning would appear to be largely absent from the existent research dealing with Twitter and education. In the context of a platform with more than 300 million monthly users this seems like a significant omission, as the platform surely retains a substantial potential for informal forms of learning.

Lifewide Learning and Cosmopolitanism

According to Jackson (2012) "lifelong and lifewide learning are considered to be necessary for learning societies which view the whole of life as an opportunity for learning" (p. 1). Ideas of lifewide learning have their roots in the "experiential learning" ideas of early 20th century educational thinkers, such as John Dewey and Eduard Lindemann (Jackson, 2012, pp. 2–3), while Jackson (2012) also sees Jost Reischmann as the most prominent contemporary theorist of lifewide learning (p.4). Reischmann's (2014) concept of lifewide learning is central here to the conceptualization of the Twitter platform as a space in which a type of informal, textual-based learning may take place. Reischmann calls lifewide learning "learning en passant" or learning "by passing by," which

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may occur in many contexts and via numerous types of actions, and can, he believes, be divided into three types of learning (p. 293). Thus, learning may occur parallel to "other planned and intended activities;" may be seen as "single event learning" linked to a "clear describable life situation" (p. 294); or as "mosaic stone learning" with outcomes "woven into life routines" (p. 296). Indeed "Mosaic stone learning" may be intertwined with many life activities. As Reischmann (2014) writes: "Reading books, magazines, newspapers, watching tv, talking to colleagues, observing others, and exchanging with whomsoever forms a universe of small learning experiences" (p. 296). He sees lifewide learning as something that is "low compulsory" and "highly individualised" and also as something that retains a degree of uncertainty in its execution, as well as its outcome; "it can happen – or not" and "different people learn different things from the same situation" (p. 296). Lifewide learning, as conceived by Reischmann, may however also be highly experiential and go well beyond the acquirement of new knowledge: "Often this learning is holistic; it includes not only knowledge, but also reality handling, emotions, valuing, perspective transformation" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 297). Lifewide learning, in the contemporary context, can also be *digital* and can take place via social media; a context that is also without doubt "low compulsory" and "highly individualised", with outcomes "woven into life routines" (p. 296).

The idea of lifewide learning as potentially facilitating a transformation in perspective means that the process of lifewide learning may also be seen as somewhat analogous to cosmopolitanism, or at least to Gerard Delanty's processual understanding of the term. Delanty (2008) sees cosmopolitanism as a normative theory but also as a social phenomenon linked to a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (p. 218). Delanty (2009) argues that cosmopolitanism should not be seen as a synonym of diversity or transnationalism, but as a "relevant and critical moment" "arising out of the encounter or interaction with the Other" when "moral and political evaluation occurs;" "a constructive process of creating new ways of thinking" which is not to be found in particular individuals – 'cosmopolitans' as opposed to 'locals' – but rather "in identity processes, such as debates, narratives, forms of cognition, networks of communication, ethical and political principles" (p. 252). It is also clear such encounters resulting in the transformation of self-understanding and a change of perspective may also occur as online encounters, in a type of "postdigital cosmopolitanism" (Lenehan, 2022).

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The most substantial argument in favour of the Internet as a tool for the advancement of a type of processual cosmopolitanism has come from Oliver Hall. He (Hall, 2018, 410) argues that the Internet may be seen as: "A communications media transmitting meaningful symbolic flows, across time-space, in virtual geographies where soft cultural types of cosmopolitan relationships can emerge in expressions of curiosity and openness located in the banal practices of online consumption of different cultural forms, but also from a greater intersubjective reflexiveness arising out of discursive intercultural exchanges". Thus, he views the Internet not just as a space packed with textual and image-based banal forms of cultural cosmopolitanism, but also as a space for possible self-reflection resulting from (medial) intercultural communication leading to a (potential) transformational process. Therefore, the Internet may also be seen as a collection of spaces full of cosmopolitan lifewide learning potential, not least on the platform Twitter/X.

Twitter/X, Literature and the Twitter/X Thread

Increasingly researchers have also seen tweets – short texts published on the Twitter platform, often in relation to images, films or other short textual expressions – as a distinct form of text. Indeed, a blog post in 2014 on *The Guardian* website already suggested that Twitter had given birth to a new literary genre: twitterature (Armitstead, 2014). Hui (2019) has argued that tweets may be placed within the continuous literary-historical context of the aphorism, "the shortest of genres;" "a basic unit of intelligible thought, this microform has persisted across world cultures and histories, from Confucius to Twitter" (p. 1). Hui defines the aphorism as "a short saying that requires interpretation" (p.5). He sees tweets as the "digital descendent of the analog aphorism" and Twitter as "the largest archive of the present the world has ever seen" (pp. 177–178). Indeed, there is little to no consensus regarding how exactly an aphorism, as a literary genre, may be defined (Spicker, 1997, p. 2; Spicker, 2004, pp. 6–8). Morson (2003) believes that aphorisms retain a degree of mystery and should not consist of "solving puzzles" but in "deepening questions" (p. 411); Maddocks (2001) emphasizes the importance of the "balancing act between irony and moral condemnation" in an aphorism (p.175), while Crosbie and Guhin (2019), from a sociological perspective, suggest that aphorisms are "often used to 'stand in' for more complex arguments" (p. 383). Of course, tweets can potentially do *all* of these things, depending on the individual tweet itself. Gray (1987) suggests that the aphorism form he examines – from the pen

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of Franz Kafka – takes root "not as an expressive form placed in the service of traditional values; nor does it undertake the *dogmatic* presentation of new values; rather it strives to imbue static, rigid values and truths with fluidity and flexibility" (p. 37). The tweets examined here often fall into this category and look to suggest a greater plurality in relation to reality-creating concepts, arguing implicitly for more fluidity and flexibility in depictions of reality.

While many individual tweets may indeed be viewed as a form of (quasi-literary) aphorism, the central interest here lies with the *Twitter/X thread* as a text form: This is a collection of tweets, often numbered and organized chronologically, 'threaded' together to create a longer text. Indeed, the academic literature relating to the platform Twitter definitely appears to have somewhat neglected the Twitter thread as a topic of analysis. Burgess and Baym (2020), in their biography of the platform, give the @, the # and the retweet full chapters, but do not analyze the thread as a unique Twitter textual form. In *Twitter and Society* (Weller et al, 2014) – one of the first edited volumes examining the platform – there is also no dedicated chapter dealing with the Twitter thread. While it is perhaps true that Twitter threads have only more recently gained in (perceived) importance on the platform since they were formalized with a more specific thread tool in 2017 – before this one had to continually answer one's own tweet to create a thread – it is also true that threads have existed on Twitter for a (relatively) long time: The 2021 film *Zola*, the first Hollywood movie to be constructed from a Twitter thread, was based on a 148 tweet thread tweeted on the platform in 2015 (Puckett-Pope, 2021).

A Twitter thread may certainly be seen as a genre in the sense that "*all* communicative behaviour is genred – or at least if we intend to make our communicative behaviour understood by others, it needs to be recognizable as a specific genre" (Blommaert, 2018, p. 52). Yet, there are also sub-genres evident within the Twitter thread itself. Sadler (2021), in his discussion of Twitter as a platform of *Fragmented Narrative*, refers to "narratives which are built up through sequentially posted fragments" which he sees as a type of "vertical storytelling" as the fragments – the threaded Tweets – are presented vertically on the screen (p. 51). However, how one views such threads on the screen is not necessarily uniform and they may be read differently, as they may appear structurally differently on your screen. Sadler sees such Twitter threads as a type of bordered and clearly defined – often numbered – "bounded narrative" which may also be encountered as single fragments or as parts of a whole (p. 52). This type of textual genre has an undoubted flexibility: "Vertical narratives may be closed when their textual boundaries are clearly defined,

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or open when they lack defined boundaries and may be added to at any time" (p. 20–21).

It is here argued that certain types of Twitter threads may be viewed as a lifewide textual offer with a cosmopolitan potentiality for a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218), including the potentiality for "perspective transformation" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 297). The term "text" is consciously used here rather than "narrative." The term narrative has experienced a rapid inflation in usage in academia rendering the term perhaps less potent: Not every text is a narrative, not every text *needs* to be seen as a narrative. The Twitter threads viewed here may perhaps be seen as narratives, or perhaps not, but they are definitely text forms and part of an emerging digital-textual genre often widely read. I would like to discuss here three types of Twitter thread: 1) A collectively-created and very open type of thread which looks for contributions from numerous followers on Twitter. These types of thread are marked by an extreme openness and plurality, as they actively seek textual interaction from a variety of sources, from which they receive their meaning and force. They are, thus, multi-agent threads which may potentially have hundreds or even thousands of contributors. 2) An individually-created closed thread which is "bounded" (Sadler, 2021, p. 52) – a starting point and endpoint are created, thus suggesting that the thread is chiefly to be read and not necessarily to be added to – and usually numbered (e.g starting with tweet 1/15 and ending with 15/15 etc.). 3) An individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, which is thus explicitly unbounded and "may be added to at any time" (Sadler, 2021, p. 20–21). The meaning and force of the second and third thread-type comes largely, I would argue, from the perceived expertise of the tweeters themselves.

1) A Collectively-Created, Open Thread: @IndigenousX

The Australian-based IndigenousX grouping describes itself as a "100 % Indigenous owned and operated media, consultancy, and training organisation" which "believes in the principles of self-determination and works to affect change by upholding knowledges, voices and ways of being" (IndigenousX, n.d.). Dedicated to digital storytelling, IndigenousX now consists of a website, a podcast, numerous social media accounts and is partnered with the Australian version of *The Guardian* newspaper. The project began, however, solely as a Twitter account, or more specifically, a curated Twitter account. A curated account is 'taken over' and run by different people, usually for a period

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of a week, allowing for the creation of multiagent and changing content with a greater diversity of perspectives. According to Burgess and Baym (2020), "Indigenous cultural and intellectual leaders created innovative and culturally appropriate forms of media activism around the rotating @IndigenousX account," which was taken over by a different Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander[1] each week, "connecting Australia's Indigenous communities with each other and with First Nations people the world over" (p. 9). Writing on the ten-year anniversary of the account, the Indigenous X founder Luke Pearson (2022) describes how "IndigenousX began as a rotating Twitter account where a different Indigenous person would take control of the account for the week and tweet about … well, whatever they wanted to." With regard to the reasons behind the founding of the curated Twitter account and the organization itself, Pearson (2022) writes: "IndigenousX was created for lots of different reasons, but a very important one was because Australian media are so woeful when it comes to reporting on Indigenous issues."

However, the hosting of the account was stopped on 14 September 2022 after one of the hosts – Professor of Indigenous Studies Sandy O'Sullivan – was threatened subsequent to her critical discussion of the British monarchy's position in the colonial system and her defence of those who wished to consciously not mourn or even lampoon the death of the 96-year-old British monarch Elizabeth II (Karvelas, 2022). The account tweeted on 14 September 2022: "Given recent events, the IndigenousX team is concerned that we cannot currently provide a safe space for hosts or followers via this account. As such, we are hitting pause on hosting in order to give us time to consider the best course of action for the future" (IndigenousX, 2022b). Thus, the "first rotating Twitter account in the world" (Deans, 2018) has ceased, for now at least, the act of rotating.

On 21 March 2022 – Australian time – the Indigenous X account was taken over by an academic called Amy Thunig. She began her curation with a short introduction, telling her Twitter audience she was a "Gomeroi/Kamilaroi person living on unceded Awabakal lands," was working as an academic "on unceded

1 According to the website of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS): "Australia's Indigenous peoples are two distinct cultural groups made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But there is great diversity within these two broadly described groups exemplified by the over 250 different language groups spread across the nation" (AIATSIS, 2020). The Torres Strait Islands are situated to the north of Australia and to the south of New Guinea.

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Darug lands," ending her tweet with the question: "Whose land are YOU on today?" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Thus, the IndigenousX Twitter community – almost 75,000 followers – was asked to say whose unceded, Indigenous land they lived on. A long multi-agent thread consisting of 218 tweeted answers to the original tweet was then created.

Fig. 1: Initial Tweet From the IndigenousX Account

Some responses were short and factual and gave the name of the indigenous peoples who had originally resided on the areas they lived in in Australia, including "Kabi Kabi," "Naarm. Woi-warrung land," "Wergaia", and "Wurundjeri Woiwurrung," while one tweeter replied that it was "Gadigal land. Never ceded – always was, always will be Aboriginal land" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Some responses came from other tweeters who identify as indigenous. Thus, a tweet from an account called Gomeroi states: "Mine!! But their Govrmnt refuses to give it back to me #landback #gomeroi" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Other tweeted replies were from non-Indigenous people who remain, however, very conscious of their privileged position within a settler state built on brutal colonialism. A response answers: "Today I'm on Jarrowair & Giabal Land, where I spent much of childhood and teenage life – visiting this place always helps me get quiet enough to spend time listening and connecting and remembering my entanglements with and responsibilities to this Country as a settler" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Many tweeters write of respect, not least in

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relation to elders who – within many Indigenous Australian traditions – are seen as intertwined with the landscape. Thus, a tweeter writes: "I am living on the unceded lands of the Wadawurrung, I pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging" (IndigenousX, 2022a). A small number of non-Australian based tweets are also to be seen from other settler states, with one person responding: "I'm in San Francisco at the moment! Which is the unceded land of the Ramaytush Ohlone people" (IndigenousX, 2022a). Thus, this tweeter consciously creates a connection between the Australian and US Indigenous context.

Fig 2: Tweeted Reactions to the Tweet From the @IndigenousX Account

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A multi-agent, open thread was created with the tweeted answers to the initial question appearing vertically on the screen, the text fragments being held together loosely. This collection of tweets may be viewed as a series of aphorisms in the manner envisaged by Gray (1987) as they strive "to imbue static, rigid values and truths with fluidity and flexibility" (p. 37); they question the validity of the existent and dominant language used in Australia to describe geographical realities, suggesting clearly and repeatedly that there are other linguistic terms linked to earlier settlements. This thread also retains, it is argued, lifewide learning and cosmopolitan potentiality which could be self-transformative due to the textual "engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218). The issue of global significance here is colonialism and mass murder, and the thread highlights successfully how Australian geographical terminology remains interconnected with colonial processes which still retain repressive power in the construction of everyday linguistic realities.

2) An Individually-Created and Closed Thread: @hayward_katy

Katy Hayward is a British political sociologist who undertook her postgraduate studies in Ireland and is now based in Northern Ireland at Queen's University Belfast. Hayward's expertise is in the area of Irish and British engagement with the European Union and, since the United Kingdom's decision to leave the Union, she has been very much in demand in relation to analyzing Northern Ireland's position within these emerging new geopolitical realities. Hayward's Twitter account @hayward_katy (Hayward, n.d.), with circa 30,000 followers, has taken on a central role in relation to her wider communication on the Brexit issue. In her Twitter account she regularly posts Twitter threads, often embedded in online humour, which break down the complexities of what is happening in relation to Brexit for a wider audience. The importance given to her Twitter account is to be seen in her receipt of the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial prize in 2019, a prize given to those deemed to have contributed to Irish-British relations and which remembers the British ambassador to Ireland murdered by the Provisional IRA in Dublin in 1976. The prize was given to Katy Hayward in 2019 "for the Twitter account on which she provides her own political and sociological account of the Brexit process as it unfolds, as well as curating an up-to-date link to a range of work by other authorities" (Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Trust., n.d.). It is worth noting that the prize is generally given to literary authors, academics or journalists based on specific

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books they have written, and it is unprecedented that someone would receive the award on the basis of a social media account.

In a thread from 5 February 2019 (Hayward, 2019) Katy Hayward analyzes the so-called Malthouse Compromise. This was an idea initiated by Conservative Party politicians in Britain to ease the Brexit situation in relation to Northern Ireland and which would, it was envisaged, keep the new external EU border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland open. As Elgot (2019) writes: "In basic terms, the prime minister would renegotiate the backstop element of her Brexit deal to replace it with a free trade agreement with as-yet unknown technology to avoid customs checks on the Irish border." The "backstop" mentioned here meant essentially that, if no other solution could be found in relation to keeping the border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland open, then the United Kingdom would remain in the European customs union, something which the more hardline Brexiteer elements in the Conservative Party greatly feared.

Hayward begins her 15 tweet thread so:

> "Who isn't fed up of the #Brexit hell-on-wheels show? We want certainty, agreement, realism… In fact, we need compromise! Could the #Malthouse-Compromise be the olive branch that shows sign of dry land on the distant horizon? (I'm thinking esp of you, @Borderlrish) 1/15."

The tweet begins with a generalized viewpoint that is, initially, actually just looking for the Brexit process to come to an end but counteracts this by suggesting that compromise is needed. The tweet is also very much in tune with the humour norms of Twitter and tags the @BorderIrish account: An account run anonymously, but which pertains to be 'run' by the border between the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland and which often uses humour in making various highly political points. Posting numerous gifs, Hayward then summarizes what the Malthouse Compromise actually contains over a number of tweets, stating sceptically in tweet nine that, in relation to the border on the island of Ireland: "Its concession to avoiding a hard border? To have checks away from borderline & to 'promise' no physical infrastructure." Here the @BorderIrish account is again tagged, giving the impression that she is actually 'talking' to the border, while she also tweets a well-known gif from the movie *Scrooged* (1988) in which the character played by Bill Murray tells one of the Christmas ghosts that "I may be invisible but I'm not deaf,"

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thus suggesting that she recognizes that the border has to be invisible and also suggesting she does not want to hurt the border's feelings!

Fig. 3: Tweet 9/15 from @hayward_katy 5 February 2019.

In her final tweet she summarizes the main problems with the so-called compromise and suggests ultimately that "this doc is designed to get an agreement within the Tory party, not with the EU."

This thread from Katy Hayward is also an example of a Twitter thread containing cosmopolitan potentiality, which could indeed perhaps result in a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218). The issue of global importance is undoubtedly here Brexit, which may also be viewed as inherently linked with processes of historical colonialism, even if this relationship is more complicated than simply seeing Brexit as an expression of colonial nostalgia and an attempt to recreate the British Empire –dislodged from the European Union –in a new form, as "imperial modes of thought" shaped the views of both sides in the Brexit debate (Saunders, 2020, p. 1143). The thread is a closed thread, not oriented towards interaction, but steeped in ironic online humour and with the tagging of anonymous (humorous) accounts. While the thread

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viewed earlier from the IndigenousX account was intentionally interactive and the communicative power of the thread came from the conscious creation of a highly pluralistic thread, this thread is based, and indeed this is true of Katy Haywood's whole Twitter account, on the perception of her expertise in relation to Brexit and on the idea that on this platform an academic is making complex issues understandable to a more general audience, in an accessible and at times humorous manner.

Fig. 4: Tweet 15/15 from @hayward_katy 5

3) An Individually-Created, Open and/or Open to Collectivization Thread: @Limerick1914

Liam Hogan is a librarian and an independent scholar based in Limerick in Ireland. In more recent years he has become prominent within Irish scholarly, intellectual and social media discourse due to his continued debunking of the "Irish slaves" narrative and accompanying online memes. This is not a narrative found in academic and scholarly history but in a small number of popular historical narratives which refuse to differentiate between indentured servitude and chattel slavery, even though "servitude in the Anglo-Caribbean was temporary and non-hereditary, with legal personhood, while chattel slavery was perpetual and hereditary with subhuman legal status," while the "re-

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fusal to differentiate" often reveals attempts "to claim spuriously that slavery had nothing to do with race" (Hogan et al., 2016, p. 19). The "Irish slaves" myth has been especially prevalent on US social media, has been used to create "an 'equality of suffering' between enslaved Africans and white Europeans" and as an online rhetorical tool to "legitimise racism and to undermine black rights struggles," whitewashing history "in the service of Irish nationalism and white supremacist causes" (Hogan, 2015). Thus, Hogan has acted as both an academic historian and online media activist in his attempts to debunk an unfounded narrative used in transnational white supremacist discourse, but which has been especially prominent in the United States (Amend, 2016).

Liam Hogan has often used individually-created open threads – often with extensive references to source-based evidence – to debunk what is essentially digital white supremacist content. These threads are usually open and are not numbered, allowing other people to add to them and allowing the author to add to them himself, often over a longer period of time. So, for example, on 23 February 2019 Liam Hogan began an open, temporally extensive thread which he added to at various times until 12 September 2019. The catalyst for the thread was an article in the *Washington Post* concerning the support of three members of the American Democratic Party for what is described as "race-based reparations" (Stein, 2019). According to Hogan's first tweet: "This is, predictably, leading to a resurgence of the 'Irish slaves' meme across all social media platforms" (Hogan, 2019). This is followed by a tweet summarizing his general position on these memes and the general purpose for their proliferation, stating: "A gentle reminder that Irish "history" has been weaponised by racists to deny justice for African Americans for nearly two centuries. It seems that many are willing to incinerate the integrity of our history in the name of white supremacy and anti-blackness," while he argues that these contemporary online arguments are "a living legacy of the racist pro-slavery ideologies of the 19th century" (Hogan, 2019). He then proceeds to draw a comparison between this contemporary discourse and 19th century discourse which saw a comparison between black chattel slavery and the position of working-class white people. Thus, he writes: "In 1834 the Irish-born District Attorney in Tennessee stated that although chattel slavery was 'unlovely' the enslaved were in better condition than 'the labouring classes in Europe' (Hogan, 2019)." He sees the same type of thinking projected onto the past in the online discussion on mythical "Irish slaves," despairing at the logic of this comparison and believing that: "It is quite something to observe the flexibility of the denialism. Whether free or indentured someone else always

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had it 'worse' than those born or condemned to racialised perpetual hereditary chattel slavery (Hogan, 2019)." He responds to this by posting a link to his own article on the numbers of slave-owners with Irish names in 1860 in the USA, who owned, he argues, a total of 110,000 slaves and, thus, points out the ridiculous nature of seeing Irish penal servitude and poverty in 19th century America and black chattel slavery as the same thing, as people who were likely to be Irish or of Irish background were also able to be slave-owners. He concludes the thread with a tweet on 14 September 2019 by directly debunking a meme circulating on Facebook showing 6 red haired girls and stating that the Irish were the first slaves. While earlier in the thread he had pointed out the discursive connections between contemporary Irish slave meme materials and racist 19th century pro-slavery discourse, he here changes tack and points out the simple falsity of the meme image itself, as: "The photo does not show 'Irish slaves' nor Irish children. It was taken on a beach in Holland by Igor Borisov & the children are Dutch (Hogan, 2019)."

Fig. 5: Tweet from Liam Hogan, 24 February 2019

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Fig. 6: Tweet From Liam Hogan, 12 September 2019

Thus, the Twitter thread examined here by Liam Hogan may be seen as an individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, which is explicitly unbounded and "may be added to at any time" (Sadler, 2021). It may also be viewed as a lifewide textual offer with a cosmopolitan potentiality for a "transformation in self-understanding as the result of engagement with others over issues of global significance" (Delanty, 2008, p. 218), including the potentiality for "perspective transformation" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 297). The issue of global significance is again colonialism and its accompanying dehumanizing and murderous practice of slavery, which continues to result in contemporary inequalities and injustice. Hogan's thread is informed by academic historical scholarship but is also embedded in digital culture and looks to debunk any truth which people may associate with a certain series of memes created to discredit justice issues for black people in the United States of America. He does this here by pointing out the similarities in these contemporary discur-

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sive practices with plainly racist 19th century pro-slavery arguments and also emphasizes the shear falsity of some memes. While he posts hyperlinks and dissects memes and the thread is very much within the norms of digital culture, the thread does not attempt the Internet humour of Katy Hayward but retains a very serious and scholarly tone. This is perhaps understandable due to its content. The sense of specific expertise which Liam Hogan retains in relation to the debunking of Irish slave memes adds to the discursive power of the thread, as does his constant references to historical evidence to back up his tweeted statements.

3. Conclusion

Thus, it was argued that lifewide learning possibilities may also be viewed in relation to social media, not least the platform Twitter and the Twitter thread, which may be seen as a lifewide textual offer containing cosmopolitan potentiality, meaning here the potential for a transformation in perspective due to contact with others on global issues, as envisioned by Delanty (2008). There is definitely potential here in these, at times, challenging social media texts for a type of "learning en passant" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 293), for a "mosaic stone learning" with potential outcomes "woven into life routines" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 296). It was also argued that the Twitter thread functions as a type of social media genre, and three distinct types of thread were identified and analyzed: 1) a collectively created and very open type of thread which looks for contributions from numerous followers on Twitter, creating a multi-agent text; 2) an individually-created, closed and usually numbered thread; and 3) an individually-created and open and/or open to collectivization thread, to which other tweets may be added at any time. Twitter threads from the curated Indigenous Australian account @IndigenousX, the British-Irish academic Katy Hayward and Irish historian Liam Hogan were analyzed as lifewide textual offers containing cosmopolitan potentiality, while the global issue at the centre of all three threads – and accounts – are the contemporary consequences of European colonialism, it was argued.

Polarization is also a major issue on social media and Twitter followers following a certain account may do so because they think similarly to the account producing the content they desire, and they may look simply to have their already-existing viewpoints validated. There is, thus, definitely a 'preaching to the converted' element present in aspects of social media. On the other hand,

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scrolling a Twitter thread is a reading experience and may also represent a form of experiential perspective-widening and could, surely, have a potential transformative effect, not least due to the reciprocal and interactive nature of the Twitter platform, which generally enables users to ask authors/tweeters questions. The interpretation and relating of digital text to one's personal experience, and whether this contains perspective-transformative dimensions, is of course a highly subjective process that remains very difficult to map in any type of objectified manner. Indeed, this is also in line with the conceptualization of lifewide learning, based as it is upon the learning potentiality and *possibility* of learning contained within a wide variety of daily life activities. Reischmann (2014) sees lifewide learning as something that is "low compulsory" and "highly individualised," as something that retains a degree of uncertainty in its execution, as well as its outcome; "it can happen – or not" and "different people learn different things from the same situation" (p. 296). Thus, social media, and specific forms of the Twitter thread, represent ideal sites for lifewide learning.

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Online Connection, Onsite Inclusion

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Exploring the Interplay of Lifewide Learning, Migration, and Social Network Sites in the Postdigital Field of Action

Yolanda López García

Abstract *Lifewide learning encompasses all forms of learning and personal development in formal, non-formal and informal modalities. This article discusses the relationship between Lifewide Learning, Social Network Sites (SNSs) and migration by reflecting on the role of SNSs as a resource for informal learning in the context of migration and its impact on the postdigital field of action. This article argues that SNSs are fields of action that are ubiquitously used and are deeply interwoven in everyday life, especially for people who wish to/or have already relocated. In these fields of action, interaction, emotional support and constant learning take place, impacting the lives and experiences of people undergoing migration. Therefore, this article considers that SNSs are highly relevant resources for learning 'informally', where sharing personal experiences not only provides concrete information regarding a situation but perhaps, more importantly, people who share or seek information find companionship in the realization that they are not alone with their doubts or situations in their new location.*

Keywords *Lifewide Learning; Informal Learning; Migration; Postdigital; Social Network Sites*

1. Introduction

How can I migrate to Germany? How can I migrate if I do not speak the language? What documents do I need to acquire a driver's licence? What are the consequences for changing my name when I get married? Am I eligible for citizenship if...? What are the school differences in Germany? I'll have a job interview, so how do I best prepare?

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These are some of the questions one often finds on Social Network Sites[1] (SNSs), such as Facebook (FB), Instagram (IG), and TikTok. From stories and tutorials on mundane to more specialized topics, SNSs present a variety of themes which are relevant within the context of migration as they are produced and consumed in part by migrants and/or people preparing and/or aiming to relocate. The topics range from how to migrate to a certain destination to other issues that help in the understanding of new ways and routines in the new place of relocation. This is to be seen either in the form of FB pages – open, closed or private groups that usually contain a title stating a nationality and the country or city of destination – or in the form of TikTok videos, where for instance typing "how to emigrate to Germany" brings up more than seventy videos offering different answers and tips, mostly based on personal experience. On IG the hashtag #emigraraalemania has generated over 645 posts, ranging from official organizations advertising job vacancies to advertisements for coaching sessions offering help in relation to job searches and the 'integration' process. This indeed is in addition to the large number of contents regarding personal experiences, portrayed in a variety of manner, from humorous to more serious forms.

While human mobility has existed for as long as homo sapiens have existed and may be seen as an intrinsic human condition, being 'connected' to the Internet represents of course a more recent practice and is not yet a widespread global reality due to the digital divide.[2] Yet, it can still be argued that life is currently taking place in a "deep mediatization" (Hepp, 2020). Everyday life is deeply intertwined with information and communication technologies (ICTs),

1 There are several definitions and categories concerning Social Network Sites. See Kneidinger-Müller (2020) and Rains and Brunner (2015) for an overview. For this paper, SNSs are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site" (boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). (The name of the author boyd is originally written in lowercase). SNSs "include – but are not limited to – capabilities (e.g. broadcasting messages, photo sharing, social gaming, etc.) that distinguish more focused genres of technologies privileging user-generated content (e.g. microblogs, photo sharing websites, etc.) (Rains & Brunner, 2015, p. 116).

2 See van Dijk (2020).

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configuring "vital technologies" (Gómez-Cruz, 2022) usage of which has increased globally, affecting – directly or indirectly –every aspect of social life. Agents navigate, co-create, and experience the social world in deep entanglement with "digital media and their structures" (Hepp, 2020 p. 5), where a "digitalization of social relationships" (Kneidinger-Müller, 2020, p. 68) may be seen as undoubtedly increasing.

In this context, the dynamics of migration have been altered and are transformed in at least two ways, as Leurs and Prabhakar (2018, p. 247) point out. On the one hand, state authorities implement ICTs for top-down governmental border control, surveillance and migration management. On the other hand, electronic devices such as "smart phones, social media platforms and apps are used by migrants as new channels to access information, resources and news; for purposes including communication, emotion-management, [and] intercultural relations" (Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018, p. 247).

This paper focuses on the second aspect mentioned above. I argue that SNSs are a crucial source of information and guidance for migrants, which impact directly on the lifewide learning process in a highly informal context. This may, indeed, appear obvious. However, it is necessary to reflect on the learning process in the framework of lifewide learning and informal learning. Furthermore, this paper ponders on the interrelationship between lifewide learning in an informal context, SNSs and migration by addressing the following questions: What is the role of SNSs as a resource for informal learning in the context of migration? What themes can be found by analyzing the content of specific SNSs? How may informal learning on SNSs influence the postdigital world?

To answer these questions, the theoretical perspectives of lifelong learning (LLL) and lifewide learning (LWL) are addressed. Furthermore, these perspectives are related to SNSs, migration and the postdigital field of action. In addition, the methodological approach and a selection of examples of the role of the SNSs in the lives of migrants will be illustrated.

This article contributes to the flourishing fields of digital migration studies (Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018) and (inter)cultural (post)digitality[3] and is part of an ongoing research project that aims to investigate the everyday life of migrants in the postdigital field of action.

3 A field which is also flourishing within intercultural studies with projects such as ReDICo (https://redico.eu) and is the *foci* of the "Research Laboratory on Postdigital (Inter)Culturality" at the Chemnitz University of Technology.

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2. Theoretical Perspectives

Lifelong Learning and Lifewide Learning

The concept of lifelong learning (LLL) has become a global educational paradigm (Elfert, 2017, p. 3), has become central to the United Nations' development agenda (United Nations, 2022) and to the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). According to UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) (2022), the definition of LLL encompasses five essential elements: It is for all age groups; at all levels of education; encompasses all learning modalities; may take place in all learning spheres and spaces; and for a variety of purposes. As is stated in the UNESCO document:

> LLL is rooted in the integration of learning and living, covering learning activities for people of all ages (children, young people, adults and the elderly, girls and boys, women and men), in all life-wide contexts (family, school, the community, the workplace, and so on) and through a variety of modalities (formal, non-formal and informal), which, together, meet a wide range of learning needs and demands. (UNESCO UIL, 2022)

LLL recognizes learning from a number of different environments and approaches it from a holistic perspective, where two dimensions are acknowledged: The lifelong dimension and the lifewide dimension. The first dimension indicates that a person learns during a complete life-span, while the latter recognizes formal, non-formal and informal learning (Skolwerket, The National Board of Education, 2000, p. 7).

Learning is understood as a lifelong and lifewide process that occurs continually at all moments and can be conceived as "experiencing, acting, recognising and making connections" (Aßmann, 2016, p. 518). These aspects are part of life's path of affronting challenges and opportunities. Thus, learning is deeply related to change (Dron & Anderson, 2014, p. 10). While the understandings of learning and education overlap, they may be differentiated according to specific characteristics (Norqvist & Leffler, 2017, p. 238). Education can be approached as a context or setting. However, learning is a lifelong process (Smith 2008, p. 8; Smith 2016, as cited in Norqvist & Leffler, 2017, p. 238) and as argued here, also a lifewide process.

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Formal, non-formal and informal learning remain difficult to divide as learning occurs continually. From a strict learning perspective "there is no 'either/or' with regard to formal, non-formal and even informal approaches" (Norqvist & Leffler, 2017, p. 239), as their boundaries retain a certain fuzziness (Aßmann, 2016, p. 524).

Lifelong learning and lifewide learning are usually issues related to education policy, labour market and workplace policy but also concern civil society (Skolwerket, The National Board of Education, 2000, p. 7). Yet, learning tends to be connected to a 'place'. For instance, formal learning and non-formal learning are related to an institution. While the former remains associated with a formal education system, the latter is usually seen as connected to an association or organization related to the non-formal educational system concerning a specific interest, for instance sport. Informal learning is usually not connected to formalized organizations (Norqvist & Leffler, 2017, p. 238).

In this regard, it is important to emphasize the correlation between learning and 'places' that offer official recognition. These places may provide certificates and/or acknowledge of acquired skills or competencies following the completion of specific educational or training programs. This is at least one of the challenges that LLL faces, requiring the commitment of various actors from different political, economic, cultural, and social sectors. The aim is to achieve multi-level policies that recognize, validate, and acknowledge skills acquired in non-formal and/or informal settings. However, within this economic, political, and social framework the fact remains that LLL has become "too narrow" and often becomes associated with "lifelong schooling" (Reischmann, 2014, p. 289–290) missing the *wide* and perhaps more ambivalent learning aspect.

Context plays a key role in understanding learning. Although learning processes are often categorized as "informal learning" and "formal learning" (Aßmann, 2016, p. 516), as mentioned already, it is not the quality of learning that distinguishes them. Rather, the context becomes the decisive factor influencing the design of these learning processes within formal and informal settings.

Moreover, learning is an ongoing process throughout an individual's life, occurring intentionally and unintentionally in a variety of activities in formal and informal settings. Lifewide Learning (LWL) offers an approach that recognizes learning as a wide-ranging, continuous and ubiquitous aspect of everyday life. It recognizes that learning is not exclusively formal and self-directed but may occur organically in various aspects of daily experience. These ongoing

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learning experiences have a significant impact on the formation and evolution of one's identity and personal development (Reischmann, 2014, p. 286).

Lifewide Learning and Social Network Sites as Informal Learning

The understanding of LWL as ongoing, wide and ubiquitous learning is directly linked to 'Information and Communication Technologies' (ICTs) (Norqvist & Leffler, 2017, p. 237). The connection to the Internet enables various ways of engagement in communication and access to information.

Learning within Internet-mediated-technologies can be further distinguished by settings that are linked to formal contexts and 'places' and therefore are more organized than others, for instance collaborative encyclopedia projects, such as Wikis, production of Educasts for YouTube, educational blogs, podcasts, Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), to name but a few examples (Kumar & Gruzd, 2019, p. 2527).

Aßmann (2016) distinguishes characteristics of formal and informal contexts (see Table 1), which are interesting to rethink in relation to SNSs. Haythornthwaite (2022) suggests that social media are consistent with informal learning. She describes informal learning as "spontaneous, unplanned, conversation-based interaction and unpredictable" (164) and notes that participation and motivation to learn are central. However, participation is diverse and can range from lurking to active posting and engagement in direct interaction in the form of messaging, friending and following, as well as using platforms in which the user's activity traces are experienced by others, in the form of publishing, searching, tagging or rating (Haythornthwaite, 2022, p. 164). Furthermore, Haythornthwaite suggests that the level of participation on each SNS is influenced by the specific environment in which it is framed and developed. When individuals perceive a particular SNS as a safe space, it tends to encourage active participation. Conversely, if the environment lacks a sense of safety and security, participation may be discouraged (Haythornthwaite, 2022, pp. 163–164).

Motivation and purpose play significant roles in understanding participation on SNSs. While learning on SNSs can be considered a form of informal learning, it is relevant to examine whether the content on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok aligns with the characteristics described by Aßmann (2016) and Haythornthwaite (2022) and is not directly associated with a formal or informal educational context.

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However, it is also possible that the content on SNSs may be more specifically arranged and with specific purposes. For example, the Twitter-based #Twitterstorians community[4] has specific practices but is still considered an informal learning community on social media (Kumar & Gruzd, 2019, p. 2532).[5]

Table 1: Learning in Formal and in Informal Contexts – Characteristics

Learning in	
Formal Contexts	**Informal Contexts**
Arranged	Not arranged
Intended	Intended and not intended
School, institutions	Family, peer group, leisure
Degree/certificate oriented	Without formal qualifications
Curricular controlled	Open to context
Mainly explicit	Implicit and explicit
Knowledge acquisition	Knowledge acquisition
Artificial problems	Situated, authentic problems

Source: Aßmann (2016, p. 518) (Trans. Yolanda López García (YLG)).

Lifewide Learning and Migration

The concept of Lifelong learning (LLL) appears to be, at present, more clearly linked to the context of migration than lifewide learning (LWL). In this light, LLL can be seen as a "beautifully simple idea" (Field, 2000, as cited in Maitra & Guo, 2019, p. 6) because it purports to represent a holistic and humanistic approach to education, that understands learning throughout different phases and settings of life, of both individuals and societies (Elfert, 2017). However, the

4 #Twitterstorians is an online community on Twitter composed primarily of historians and history enthusiasts. See Kumar, P., & Gruzd, A. (2019) and #Twitterstorians on Twitter.

5 For other research on informal learning on professional communities on Twitter see Lina Gomez-Vasquez et al. (2021) and Lee and Sing (2013) on their study on social media as an informal learning platform.

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concept needs also to be more critically reflected upon as scholars such as Elfert (2017) and Maitra and Guo (2019) point out by arguing that LLL has evolved in time and context "from being 'an element of freedom' to 'the educational response to the new market order'" (Elfert, 2017, p. 3). They sustain this argument highlighting that the 'skills agenda' is based on the utilitarian discourse of the 1990s transformation of economic globalization and neoliberalism, abandoning humanist and democratic principles at the outset of LLL's conceptualization (Elfert, 2018, p. 28 in Maitra & Guo, 2019).[6] In this sense, there is a certain scepticism concerning the achievement of the UN goals that are directly related to the lives of migrants such as "quality education" (SDG 4) and "decent work" (SDG 8) "due to the inability [of LLL] to effectively address migration" (English & Mayo, 2019, p. 215).

While there is a diverse and vast literature concerning lifelong learning and migration (Alfred, 2010; Cavaco et al., 2014; Cuban, 2014; Maitra & Guo, 2019; Majhanovich & Deyrich, 2017; Mcnair, 2009) less has been found linking these aspects with SNSs and, moreover, with LWL. This blind spot in relation to transnational migration has been pointed out by Maitra and Guo (2019). They argue that little research has been undertaken on the ways in which the skills and knowledge offered in the LLL field are frequently rooted in colonial forms of knowledge formation and racist practices. In the context of transnational migrants living and working in Western countries, it is particularly important to explore such practices. Nevertheless, LLL policies and practices are central in the global effort to respond to increased migration (English & Mayo, 2019, p. 215). In this light, it can thus be said that the interrelationship between migration and lifewide learning undoubtedly needs to be explored further:

> Despite the differences among migrants, refugees and temporary workers […] in terms of the reasons for the precarious situation they are in, we see great similarity in their issues – the quest for decent work and lifelong learning […] opportunities – and address them collectively with a particular focus on the integrated efforts necessary to facilitate improvement in their living condition. (English & Mayo, 2019, p. 214)

6 For more on the historical evolution of LLL see: Elfert (2017). For the discussion regarding anti-colonial and anti-racist perspectives on lifelong learning and transnational migration see: Maitra and Guo (2019).

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People who relocate to another country might often experience difficulties in the process of entering formal or non-formal education, e.g. because of difficulties in getting their previous studies recognized, or because they do not speak the official language of the country to which they have migrated (Stanistreet, 2022).[7]

The level of language proficiency, or even the insecurity one may feel when speaking another language, plays a crucial role when it comes to obtaining information from organizations or institutions. Mistrust and fear of approaching these institutions often leads to avoiding contact altogether. In such a scenario, the importance of acquiring informal learning through SNSs becomes even more pronounced, especially in the context of migration.

Digital media has been described as an essential component of the journey of 21st century migrants (Moran, 2022, p. 3), who live in one place, but use mobile devices and SNSs to carry out their lives around the world (Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018, p. 248). Migrants interact with and integrate the use of mobile devices connected to the Internet and 'produse'[8] content for SNSs, which becomes embedded with their migratory experience.

In some cases, SNSs are used for 'exchanging' and 'obtaining' information in the sense of a "networked individualism" (Wellman, 2002). But in other cases, SNSs serve as digital spaces where communities are created by "mobile actors in multiple locations [enabling] new forms of intergenerational solidarities" (Nedelcu, 2020, p. 343); also enabling the maintenance of social ties across spatial distance through everyday digital practices (Friese, 2020, p. 29) related to a common topic of interest (Busso, 2016, p. 231).

The Postdigital Field of Action in a Migratory Context

In human mobility, an ongoing dynamic of multiple and intertwined imaginaries plays an important role in influencing the reasons for migration. For

7 Stanistreet (2022) argues that LLL is at a crossroads since it has failed to improve their working and living conditions instead of facilitating adaptation and integration. The concept of integration has been heavily criticized as it has been applied in terms of assimilation into the 'mainstream culture'. According to Foroutan (2015, p. 209): "Paradoxically, the concept of integration has itself become an obstacle to integration and a concept of exclusion." (Translation YLG).

8 The term produser is used to emphasize the dual role of agents as users and producers of content, information and learning, interacting, learning and sharing. See: Bruns and Schmidt (2011).

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example, the macro-political, social and economic conditions, the goals and plans of individuals, the visions of another way of life remain part of the ongoing dynamic of imaginaries that are constantly reconfigured through resources such as the media and the experiences of migrants, among others (López García, 2021). With the inclusion of SNSs in everyday life, imaginaries are further reconfigured, for example, with content from people displaying their lifestyle in another location.

In a scenario that combines informal learning, LLL and LWL, SNSs and migration allow one to reflect on the possibilities not only for receiving information from elsewhere and, thus, contributing to the continuous reconfiguration of the stock of knowledge reconfiguring '*E*-maginaries'. I propose to reframe social imaginaries as social *E*-maginaries: Social imaginaries are understood as socially constructed schemes of meaning that influence the thinking and doing of actors within specific fields of action in which they interact.[9] I propose social *E*-maginaries as a concept that seeks to provide a theoretical and methodological lens with which to rethink imaginaries within the postdigital field of action.[10]

Social *E*-maginaries acknowledge on the one hand the digital embeddedness of everyday life in a context of deep mediatization (Hepp, 2020), and on the other hand the role that *e*magination (Romele, 2019) and algorithmicity play in (re)shaping realities (Cabrera Altieri, 2021; Stalder, 2018). Furthermore, social *E*-maginaries impact the thinking and doing of human and non-human actors (Latour, 2008) in the postdigital field of action.

The concept of social *E*-maginary is inspired by the work of Alberto Romele (2019, p. 89) and his concept of *e*magination or, as he also frames it, "electronic or digital imagination". *E*magination "exalts the interpretational emerging capacities of digital machines" (Romele, 2019, p. 87) and, therefore, their "productive imagination" after Paul Ricoeur's understanding of the "reorganization of meaning". For Romele (2019, p. 100), digital technologies are "imaginative

9 The thinking and doing of actors refer to shared schemes of meaning influencing what actors perceive and think but also what they do, meaning their practices. This perspective acknowledges that actors belong to multiple fields of action, therefore social imaginaries are also multiple. Through macro and micro factors, social imaginaries are constructed and influenced by historical context, power struggle, political and economic ideas, etc. See: López García, 2021.

10 Although stated in singular, it is referred to in plural, since there are as many fields of action as there are multiple *E*-maginaries.

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machines". In this sense, algorithms can be approached as imaginaries (Cabrera Altieri, 2021) due to their signifying function. Algorithms influence the reconfiguration of social meaning since they articulate, on the one hand, the networked presence of computer technologies and, on the other hand, the human-shared-experience of socio-cultural activities (Cabrera Altieri, 2021, p. 128). Stalder's (2018, p. 6) concept of "algorithmicity" explains the function of algorithms that shape and structure experiences, interactions and decision-making processes, while also reducing complexity – a function that is similar to a phenomenological and praxis-oriented approach to culture defined as that which is known, routine and taken-for-granted i.e. the reduction of complexity.[11]

The postdigital[12] is used to emphasize the ubiquitous presence of digital technologies (and SNSs) in everyday life. The term postdigital highlights the continuity and fuzziness between the 'online' field of action and the 'offline' field of action.[13] The allusion to the 'post' signifies the continuity and deep overlapping and entanglement (Knox, 2019, p. 358) of the digital in multiple spheres of everyday life practice.

Agents are not merely passive consumers of information in media, but also produce it as produsers while it is deeply embedded in the daily reality of postdigital life. It is within the interaction of agents in the postdigital field of action that meaning is reconfigured and impacts on postdigital practices. 'Fields of action' designate here the situated and specific context of interactions between human and non-human agents within a context mediated by digital technology. The everyday life[14] is understood as a network in which an unlimited number of fields of action are connected, in which human and non-human agents interact at different levels and at different times. The agents interacting in these fields of action may build up a familiarity that allows them

11 See here Bolten, 2020.

12 For the understanding and discussion on postdigitality, see Andersen et al. (2014); Cramer (2014); Knox (2019); and Lenehan (2022).

13 While the dichotomies between these fields of action remain obsolete (Friese, 2020), I frame these as two fields solely for the purpose of clarity and operationality. I am not claiming that they are isolated from each other, on the contrary, I argue that these fields are deeply entangled and embedded. For more regarding the understanding and discussion of posidigitality see: Andersen et al. (2014); Cramer (2014); Knox (2019); and Lenehan (2022).

14 See here: Berger and Luckmann (1966/1991, p. 37).

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to act in a familiar and routine form depending on each specific interaction, configuring thus postdigital cultures.

3. Methodology

This chapter focuses on active engagement by posting, sharing information and/or asking questions and participating in conversations. It is not only active participation that involves learning: Forms of lurking and passive reading in SNSs (Haythornthwaite, 2022, p. 164) are interesting aspects to consider and analyze but are not included in this chapter.

Study Procedures and Ethics

This is an extract from an ongoing and multifaceted research project relating to the postdigital everyday life of migrants. For the specific purpose of this paper, part of the Facebook corpus is presented. The methodology has its inspiration in the bricolage approach. The bricoleur navigates between different concepts and techniques, using them as ad hoc tools (Kincheloe et al., 2018). The tools used in this research comprise aspects of netnography (Kozinets, 2015; Kozinets & Gambetti, 2021), thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and a thick data approach (Latzko-Toth, et al., 2017).

The netnographic research includes online participation and passive observation in different groups of FB concerning Latin American and Spanish people in Germany, in Europe and in the world. This article is based on two specific groups, one private and one public.

The data utilized in this article was collected between 2021 and 2022. For the private group, one post is the initiator of this study regarding learning. In the case of the public group, three hundred comments were collected using the tool 'Instant Data Scraper'. In contrast to the, to an extent, conventionalized belief that "quantity equals quality" (Latzko-Toth, et al., 2017, p. 3), this study takes a different path, adopting the concept of thick data in the era of big data (Wang, 2016, as cited in Latzko-Toth, et al., 2017, p. 4). Recognizing thick data's profound significance in providing deep meaning and narrative despite smaller sample sizes, this approach prioritizes qualitative insights and contextual depth over sheer data volume (Latzko-Toth, et al., 2017, p. 4). The corpus has been analyzed applying thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), lo-

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cating principal themes to be analyzed via hermeneutic analysis (Bolten, 1985; Schriewer, 2014), using the MAXQDA programme.

The learning theme emerged from a post I initiated in a private group, originally in Spanish. The question and answers to this post belong to a private FB group. However, I have permission to use the answers for this particular post, albeit anonymously. In order to guarantee the anonymity of the users, their details will not be given, and the posts will be translated from Spanish into English and paraphrased allowing no possibility of tracing them, as suggested by various ethical guidelines (franzke[15] et al., 2020; Leurs & Prabhakar, 2018; Sandberg et al., 2021).

Information from a public group on FB is also addressed. The group does not retain any rules regarding the use of information. In accordance with ethical guidelines (franzke et al., 2020), and although there is no explicit consent to quote the information as this is a public FB group, it is possible to use the data in a way that is protective of the users. However, since I do not have explicit consent to quote the information, I will refer to the information by paraphrasing it so that it cannot be traced and the produsers will be anonymized.

It is important to say that on IG, Twitter and TikTok, the accounts I use indicate that I am a researcher. For FB, however, I have been using my own private FB account, which I have had since the year 2007. Nevertheless, I have added as further information that I am a scholar of intercultural relations, social imaginaries and postdigitality. The moderators and members of the private group are informed that I am a researcher. They have also been informed about my intentions to conduct research in this specific group, which remains ongoing.

Description of Facebook Groups

It is currently difficult to state with clarity what, exactly, FB is. As Bucher (2021, p. 9) states "Facebook is Facebook", yet: FB "is no longer, if it ever was, just a social network site. It's a global operating system and a serious political, economic and cultural power broker" (Bucher, 2021, p. 10).[16] However, for the purpose of this chapter, FB is still recognized as an SNS focusing on the functions of posting comments, sharing videos, photographs, files, and links to

15 The name of the author aline shanti franzke is originally written in lowercase. See franzke et al. (2020).

16 See here also: Leena Korpijaakko (2015).

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other content, creating live streams, and engaging in communication through groups that may be confidential, closed or private and public.

This study focuses on two FB groups: One is private and encompasses almost nine thousand members while the other is public and encompasses approximately sixty thousand members. This article argues that FB continues to be relevant in many people's lives, despite discussions concerning its diminishing appeal and declining membership, especially among younger people (Bucher, 2021, p. 10).

The dynamics within the examined FB groups develop in different ways. There are answers that are friendly and provide information regarding the question asked. There are also opinions concerning the difficulties of emigration when someone has no command of the language, for example, which come across as a warning against the romantic idea of emigrating and living the 'German dream' or the 'European dream'.[17] Other posts, on the other hand, make fun of the intention to emigrate by offering a critical or derisive opinion that does not contribute much to the person asking the question.

Private Group

The group is not only a space for interaction and recreation, but also a space for emotional support and constant learning in relation to various practical topics.[18] These topics include: a day for self-promotion of users' own businesses; guidance on bureaucratic procedures, such as obtaining citizenship, renewing residence permits or learning to drive; parenting philosophies and tips; and various topics related to everyday life in Germany, which are probably important for members planning mobility to Germany and, therefore, use the group strategically.

The private group is also a female-only group. These women are considered in this article as 'produsers'; they are users of the group, but also producers and co-creators of information that they have learned and experienced. They interact, share, and exchange information in the FB group in relation to topics that not only remain in the group, but are quite important for their life 'outside' of the group.

17 The author has discussed the German Dream and the European Dream elsewhere. See: López García, 2021.

18 Similar to the findings of other researchers, e.g. see: Castañeda Díaz and Baca Tavira (2019).

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The following question was asked: "[…] How do you think that your 'online' activity in this group takes part in your daily 'offline' life? That is, the impact of your digital activity on your analogue life?" (see Figure 1). Nine comments related to learning were collected. It is important to note that learning was not an explicit part of the question. The link to learning aspects is, however, precisely the reason for this chapter.

For this question, the dichotomy between 'offline' and 'online' is made intentionally. Asking this question ensures clarity and comprehension among the group members: In order to be able to ask participants about postdigitality, the concept needed firstly to be operationalized and distinguished. In this case, I argue that there was a need to clearly specify the fields of action in which the members of the group interact, which in this case was the online and offline fields of action. However, it needs to be clarified that as discussed in Section 2[19], the online and offline fields of action are not intended to be isolated. Yet the embeddedness and entanglement of these fields of action may not necessarily be obvious for many people – as interpreted and presumed here for the case of the members of the FB group. The responses emphasized the role of learning from others' experiences, from people going through the same experiences, creating a kind of bond; learning from people with similar backgrounds, which helps to understand 'everything'; and resolving doubts and helping others by giving practical recommendations and tips.

Other answers stressed that learning may indeed be seen as the word that is the driving force for participants/users: Learning in all aspects of life, especially when one is not in one's home country and does not have family in Germany. The group, therefore, should be seen as a network of support, where not only doubts, but also problems may be shared, and people understand because of their similar cultural background. Sharing and engaging in this group makes participants/users feel less lonely. They experience support, which is important for their life in Germany. These is clear in the following statements from two of the group participants:

> Learning, I would say, is the word. You learn a lot by reading about the experiences of others. It influences a lot, especially when it is not our home country, and we have a lot to learn about it.

19 See also footnote 15.

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> The most important thing for me is to read the experience of other Latin women in Germany, which is very similar to my own experience. It helps to understand things.

Public Group

In the public group, the most frequently recurring themes are those related to finding a job, advice and information on how to emigrate to Germany, and specific questions regarding the finding of accommodation, how to find a position within vocational training or education, how to get diplomas and certificates recognized, and driving licences, etc. In other words, questions concerning bureaucratic procedures in Germany. The contributions contain information concerning people who either do not yet speak German and do not understand the information, or who speak German but are uncertain whether they really understand the information very well.

Particularly interesting are the posts from people looking for information on how to emigrate to Germany. They write that they do not speak the German language and do not have an emigration visa. In other words, they are looking for information on strategies for life and work in Germany without the necessary documents. In these posts, there is often a comparison with perceptions and experiences of undocumented work in the United States of America.

In this respect, the responses to these posts are varied. While there are answers that try to be precise and well-founded in their information and points of view regarding the difficulties of living in Germany without visa and work permission, other people offer information regarding strategies to achieve forms of living and working in Germany without visa permission, announcing that they are, or were, 'irregular' migrants. This is a very delicate subject to deal with in a public and open group. However, there are other users who condemn such questions and motivations, pointing out that Germany is very different from the United States in this respect.

4. Informal Lifewide Learning on Facebook

What can we learn from LWL in the postdigital field of action? Can such practices of interacting and sharing information, either through hard facts or through other people's experiences on SNSs, be considered learning per se?

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According to the understanding of learning in informal contexts discussed in Section 2.2, the comments analyzed in this article are considered to be part of LWL highlighting in an informal learning context. The characteristics described by Aßmann (2016) and Haythornthwaite (2022) for learning in formal and informal contexts align with the results of the netnographic and thematic analysis conducted on Facebook. The analysis focused on everyday situations and issues that produsers commented on relating to their life, whether planning to relocate to Germany or, indeed, if the relocation had already taken place. LWL emphasizes that learning occurs continuously, ubiquitously in wide and varied areas within everyday life. In this case, informal contexts of SNSs are considered as crucial fields of action where learning occurs. The posts on the analyzed groups hold specific relevance for the members of the FB groups observed in this study. The problems and contexts are situated, and though complete authenticity cannot be guaranteed, it is inferred that the produsers engaging in discussions are genuine. The produsers post questions, share their experiences, and participate in discussions, creating an environment that fosters authenticity within the analyzed groups.

Not only do they exchange with each other, but they also openly share what they have experienced in situations that lie outside of their regular routines and seem unfamiliar. These situations can be referred to as experiencing interculturality (Bolten, 2020). Particularly in the private group, members willingly share situations in which they have encountered differences and felt a sense of strangeness and uncertainty. In these instances, they seek feedback and alternative perspectives to better understand the meaning of the experiences they have lived.

Produsers also extend their sharing beyond their current context to include experiences and events from their places of origin or other places where they have connections, be it with friends, family or previous residences. These exchanges contribute to a rich network of diverse experiences. It is here interpreted that these exchanges might foster a sense of global connectedness and can be helpful and enrich the horizon of experiences and, therefore, learning in a wide sense.

In the specific case of learning it can be interpreted that there is the 'need' to acquire knowledge about specific topics in order to gain insights and be able to 'solve' some situation as some of the posts show. However, especially in the private group it may be observed that 'connections' are established in a sense of bonding within a community. As the posts show, exchanging information and sharing experiences enable some of the produsers observed in the study to not

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only feel more confident in an unknown context, but also to feel less lonely in their new location. This is seen clearly and explicitly in posted statements:

> It is definitely a very important support network. Any doubt, any problem, knowing that there is this network of women who speak your language and maybe the culture is a bit more similar to yours, gives relief. I don't feel so alone.

> I think that social media allows us to maintain links (albeit virtual) with people who are far away. In addition to that, groups or communities like this one become a great support for integration and support among people in similar circumstances, migrants in Germany (in this case).

All of these information flows, co-created, shared, and consumed by produsers, play a significant role in reshaping social *E*-maginaries, specifically focusing on life in Germany. These *E*-maginaries are constructed through interactions on SNSs, which, as demonstrated in this study, actively contribute to reshaping the web of knowledge that influences the creation of meaning and practices in the postdigital field of action.

Postdigital practices, such as liking, commenting, sharing, and most importantly, exchanging knowledge, are integral components of lifewide learning across a broad range of topics. In a migratory context, these practices hold particular relevance for the members of the Facebook (FB) groups analyzed in this chapter.

On the issue of migration in relation to LLL, English and Mayo (2019) point out in their critique (see Section 2) that rethinking LLL with appropriate policies in low-income countries would mean "a paradigmatic shift in preventing migrants and refugees from risking their lives in search of better prospects in the Global North" (p. 216). In the public group in particular, people still living in Latin American countries ask how they can emigrate to Germany. They perceive that the quality of life in Germany is much better than in their home countries. While some people respond in a friendly way, offering solutions and strategies or telling them about the difficulties of living in Germany, others respond in a more aggressive way, pointing out the difficulties of migrating to Germany by highlighting that the 'German dream' is a myth. In some cases, they make the distinction that in order to move to Germany, certain formalities are required in terms of official education, such as language and official academic and vocational studies. From these interactions it is interpreted that an *E*-maginary is

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reconfigured where Germany is a place where documented migration, official documents and formal knowledge are elements that can hardly be overlooked.

While English and Mayo (2019) are right to question LLL and the reasons for migration, human mobility persists, and migrants interact with and integrate the content of SNSs as a tactic to fuel their migratory experience. Therefore, a perspective that acknowledges LWL and learning in informal context needs to be further investigated.

5. Final Reflections

This chapter has reflected on the interrelation between lifewide learning, SNSs and migration by showing that SNSs are a crucial source of information and guidance for migrants. SNSs are considered as an informal context where interactions, sharing experiences and information takes place. Moreover, the analysis of two Facebook groups using tools from netnographic research, thick data and thematic analysis has shown that Facebook remains relevant for the members of both the private and public group. The predominant topics in both groups have to do with everyday life issues such as work, official formalities in Germany, school issues, but also with questions concerning how to emigrate to Germany. The private group contains other, more private and intimate topics that were not discussed in this chapter for ethical reasons. Therefore, it can be said that wide and informal learning takes place here and is considered important for gaining familiarity in the various, practical topics. Furthermore, as the comments used in this article show, for some members of the groups, belonging to those groups enable them to create bonds in the form of a community. This clearly makes them feel less alone in their experience of migration.

This chapter has also approached the perspectives of lifelong learning and lifewide learning. While LLL seems to be more dominant in the literature than LWL, further research and reflection needs to be undertaken investigating learning from the perspective of wider and informal experiences: For instance, empirical research exploring lifewide learning in relation to postdigital practices.

It can be concluded that the role of the SNSs in a migration context is considered to be highly relevant, as SNSs are sources through which questions may be asked that are not answered by other official bodies. It would be necessary to investigate whether this is a matter of deficiencies in the way information is

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provided, or whether it is a matter of the mistrust that official bodies generate for people in a migratory context, or indeed both.

Future research is needed to explore the impact of the postdigital field of action and effects on the reconfiguration of social *E*-maginaries in everyday life; indeed the theoretical contours of the concept of the *E*-maginary will be more fully elaborated upon in a forthcoming article. Specifically regarding the topic of informal learning, a need remains to examine more closely the impact of online interactions, while also incorporating their impact on offline life. In other words, there is a need to examine more closely the entanglements of postdigital life.

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Does Integration Still Take Place 'at the Local Level'?

Challenging a German Integration Paradigm in a Postdigital World

Roman Lietz and Magdalena Loska

Abstract *An essential paradigm of the (German) integration discourse is that integration takes place 'at the local level', i.e. in the social sphere, at school, at work, in conversation with neighbours, in sports clubs, and in many other community places and concrete spaces. Ultimately, these are (or have been) the places and spaces where migrants have acquired essential information and could establish contacts with compatriots or with the local domestic society. The Internet seems to challenge the logic of this integration paradigm. Social proximity, contact to the native society as well as to 'established migrants', no longer necessarily has to take place in the material and analogue 'neighbourhood', but – we argue – has been increasingly occurring on the Internet. Thus, the Internet has also become a new lifewide space for learning how to participate in society. Integration continues to take place 'at a local level', but the 'local level' is no longer solely to be understood in a material sense.*

Keywords *Digital Diaspora; Postdigitality; Integration; Participation; Migration*

1. Introduction

While acknowledging that the integration of immigrants – we prefer to speak of *participation,* as we believe that *to take part* is the basic aim of all integration efforts – has been a political challenge for some time, it represents a greater individual challenge for migrants themselves. In view of contemporary thoughts on lifewide learning (Reischmann, 2014), we ask ourselves: How and where may one *learn* integration? The answer should be 'at a local level' – at least if we fol-

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low the catchphrase, and the integrational concept it transports, that has dominated the German discourse consistently in the last two decades.

This chapter describes the importance of the locality level in the integration discourse. It critically discusses this guiding principle against the background of growing and ubiquitous digitality and reflects on the role of digital media in digital diasporas, thus also contributing to digital migration studies.

2. Integration Takes Place at a Local Level: The Presentation of a Paradigm

Setting the learning place for integration at a local level does not come as a surprise, since this is where everyday encounters, conversations, and other participatory processes take place. But this concession to the local environment is less self-evident than one may initially assume, at least in the German context.

During the first major influx of non-German workers to the Federal Republic of Germany from 1955 onwards, integration was the task of the Federal Government or occasionally (in educational matters) of the Federal States. Indeed, according to Klaus J. Bade, it remains doubtful if we can really speak at all of "integration" for these first decades, as the German grand seigneur of integration studies describes German integration policy up to the 1990s in terms of being in "deep sleep" (Bade 2007, p. 37).[1] With the increasing awareness that Germany was indeed a country of immigration, those actors who had already made practical efforts regarding the integration of migrants became aware of their factual roles: For the municipalities[2], especially the big cities (Schammann et al., 2020, p. 6), "there has been de facto no alternative to integration at a local level" (Bommes, 2011, p. 194). These actors of practical integration were indeed on-site 'at a local level': mayors, integration officers, advice centres, welfare organizations, schools, neighbours, sports clubs, community interpreters, and migrant organizations (Weiss, 2013, p. 22).

The continued and constantly reiterated postulation that integration takes place 'at a local level' has become a repetitively communicated "semantic formula" (Bommes, 2011, p. 194); a "mantra" (Bommes, 2011, p. 215); a "slogan" (Bommes, 2011, p. 197); a "catchphrase" (Williams, 2010, p. 17); or a "motto"

1 All translations by the authors of this chapter.

2 For more on the German system of multilevel governance, see: https://portal.cor.europa.eu/divisionpowers/Pages/Germany-Systems-of-multilevel-governance.aspx.

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(Kerpişçi, 2022, p. 58); or perhaps indeed may be seen as a paradigm – an unquestioned tenet that nobody dares to contradict.

In 2007, the German Federal Government ennobled this approach as a "key issue" (Federal Government 2020b, p. 20) giving it in the first edition of the National Integration Plan, the 'manifesto' for integration – and now also using the term participation – a prominent place:

> Integration takes place at a local level. The immediate living environment has a central function in the integration process. It is the centre of life and a field of contact for immigrants and the local population. For social co-existence and the chances of integration, the local living conditions, the design of the residential environment and the public and private infrastructure offers are therefore important framework conditions. (Federal Government, 2007, p. 19)

> Integration takes place at a local level. It is in the municipalities, cities and neighbourhoods where it is decided whether the integration of people with a migration background succeeds. This is where opportunities and problems become visible. The basis for a peaceful and equal coexistence lies in the municipalities. (Federal Government, 2007, p. 22)

> Integration is decided at a local level! Encounters between people with and without a migration background take place in neighbourhoods in cities and communities, districts and quarters. It is in the municipalities that it becomes apparent, whether integration succeeds or fails. Successes of integration – but also problems – are most noticeable here. (Federal Government, 2007, p. 24)

While municipalities have benefited politically from their role as integration agents and have gained additional socio-political competencies (Bommes, 2011, pp. 213–215), the nation-state has been losing its importance as a shaper of integration in two respects: On the one hand, competences and prospects for solutions are shifting to the level of the European Union (especially regarding migration issues), on the other hand, the nation-state loses importance towards the local level (especially regarding social welfare interventions) (Bommes, 2011, p. 195). Numerous political (funding) programmes in Ger-

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many, over the last decade and a half[3], bear witness to this shift away from the nation-state level and towards the local level.

In the *National Integration Action Plan* (Nationaler Aktionsplan Integration) which represents an updated version of the earlier *National Integration Plan*, the catchphrase "integration at a local level" is highlighted within its very own section in the action plan for inclusion, putting this paradigm on the same level as central fields of action for successful participation such as "integration into the labour market", "integration and education", "integration in the civic engagement and voluntary work" (Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, 2020a, p. 16; and Federal Government Commissioner for Migration, Refugees and Integration, 2020b, p. 10). The local municipality continues to be assigned the key role in integration, as this is seen as where 'everyday life' and 'encounters' take place (Federal Government, 2020, p. 60).

3. Dimensions for Integration (Participation)

In order to capture integration systematically and semantically, we follow the approach of Friedrich Heckmann (1997, p. 4; 2015, pp. 72–73), according to which integration takes place in four dimensions, thus also defining the position of the agents in the welfare state (Bommes, 2011, p. 205). Heckmann's four dimensions are: (1) the structural, (2) the social, (3) the cultural, and (4) the identificatory. The structural dimension means participation in the labour market, the obtaining of educational qualifications, participation in the housing market and in the healthcare system (e.g. use of preventive medical check-ups). The social dimension includes social interaction, friendship and participation in voluntary sectors: thus, in a broader sense, social and leisure behaviour. According to Heckmann (1997), the cultural dimension

3 Such as the German programmes "Soziale Stadt" (Social City) (Federal Ministry of the Interior BMI); "Beschäftigung, Bildung und Teilhabe vor Ort" (Employment, Education and Participation at a Local Level) (Federal Ministry of Transport, Building and Urban Affairs BMVBS); "Migration/Integration und Stadtteilpolitik" (Migration/Integration and Urban District Policy) (BMVBS); "Integration durch Sport" (Integration through Sport) (German Olympic Sports Confederation DOSB); "Orte der Integration" (Places of Integration) (Baden-Württemberg-Foundation); and "Integration vor Ort – Stärkung kommunaler Strukturen" (Integration at a Local Level – Strengthening Municipal Structure) (Baden-Württemberg State Ministry, 2022) and many more.

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describes processes "related to learning cognitive skills and knowledge of the culture of the immigration country" (p. 4). This is about "functional competence requirements and knowledge bases that are necessary for participation in work and life processes" (Heckmann, 2015, p. 160). It should be noted that cultural integration should reject the idea of an assimilative leading culture (a so-called "Leitkultur") e.g. the expectation that one should watch popular TV shows, listen to traditional folk music or separate rubbish properly for recycling as a sign of supposed cultural integration. However, learning the dominant language of the society is regarded as an essential requirement for cultural participation, as well as a knowledge of how living together in society is organized, meaning here core institutions, core administrative processes, and core places (Heckmann, 1997, p. 4; Heckmann, 2015, p. 160). Finally, the fourth dimension includes identificatory integration. This concerns the sense of belonging, i.e. whether participation is accompanied by identification. Different hybrid forms of identification are also conceivable here.

4. Participation and Lifewide Learning at a Local Level

The formula "integration takes place at a local level" is often linked to a decentralist concept of political decision-making i.e. shifting decision-making powers to the municipal level. However, the idea of integration taking place at the local site goes beyond the political level and penetrates the civic-societal level. As depicted by McLeod (2023), according to Vygotsky, sociocultural learning occurs through interaction with the sociocultural environment (the civic society). Here at the local place is where problem-solving strategies are conveyed in collaborative and dialogical steps by "more knowledgeable" members of society (McLeod, 2023). These "more knowledgeable" members of society who are helpers or 'teachers' during the lifewide learning integration process, can also be called "established migrants" (Lietz, 2014, p. 360) and are often found in "ethnic communities" (Heckmann, 2015, p. 3):

> Here, and not at government authorities, they [the new immigrants] receive the main support; here they are provided with most of the necessary knowledge about the host country; it is here that everything takes place which the public often assumes develops in its own. (Weber, 2006, p. 61)

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Thus, learning how to participate takes place on a daily, continuous, unplanned, and uncontrolled basis (Reischmann, 2014, p. 287). It wards off deficit orientation and targets the resources of immigrants and their environment (Reischmann, 2014, p. 292). This process is, therefore, fully consistent with what Reischmann (2014) calls lifewide learning and is congruent with the lifewide learning ideas of the "mosaic stone learning-outcomes" formed from different situations, contacts and experiences. Competences are acquired *en passant*, but the lifewide learning process also retains a certain ambivalence: It is not really possible to name exactly when and where a learning stage is mastered (Reischmann, 2014, p. 296).

Indeed, integration has always taken place and still takes place today in the above-mentioned dimensions "at a local level" (Bommes, 2011, p. 215): Where one goes to school and to work; where one finds a home and participates in the healthcare sector (*structural level*); where one makes friendships and where one visits sport clubs (*social level*); where one uses in everyday situations e.g. in the supermarket, in the neighbourhood the dominant language and core knowledge of culture (*cultural level*); and where one finally feels at home, or at least as part of society (*identificatory level*). But society has experienced something of a disruptive change: Does this focus on a close physical localization still apply unconditionally in a digitalized society? Do today's everyday life and encounters not (also) take place online? What impact does this new reality have on integration practices and paradigms?

5. Digital Migration Studies

The concept of locality as immanent in the integration paradigm – 'integration takes place at a local level' – is now tested by digitality. Everyday life and domains that used to be exclusively material now increasingly take place online, sometimes making personal physical contact itself appear obsolete e.g. online shopping, online dating, and online meetings. Of course, these domains are not exclusively virtual in nature; online shopping and online dating are followed by decidedly haptic, material experiences. However, digital technology remains so ubiquitous, of course also – or indeed especially – for migrants (Arnold et al., 2017, p. 7), that everyday practices can no longer be easily divided into either "virtual" or "real" (Friese, 2020, p. 7). Thus, Cramer (2014, p. 13) uses the term *postdigitality*, a societal development in which digital technology is omnipresent even in the (supposedly) material world. Thus, we live now almost

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permanently in a hybrid, postdigital state (Conti et al., forthcoming; Thelwall, 2013, pp. 69f.).

The hope that the Internet would promote the social participation of migrants has also been increasingly associated with digitalization (Hinkelbein, 2014, p. 23). Above all, the migration development to and in Europe from 2015 onwards was very effective in the sense of connecting social participation with the postdigital. For the first time we directly experienced a large number of migrants who could access the Internet via their smartphone throughout every step of their journey: Planning the migration, during the actual journey, during the acculturation process and, not least, while also maintaining contact with their country of origin (Moran, 2022, p. 1). Diminescu (cited in Moran, 2022, p. 2) has written as early as 2008 of "connected migrants", i.e. migrants who appropriated the Internet in the course of their migration (see also: Kok and Rogers, 2017, quoted in Moran, 2022, p. 2). These occurrences, observed by scientists, have given birth to Digital Migration Studies (Moran 2022, p. 1). More precisely, Moran (2022, p. 3) states that digital media have added "a new dimension" to the phenomenon of migration.

German governmental policies have also taken this into account: The informational behaviour of immigrants is described as "decentralized in self-organized networks and in digital and social media" (Federal Government, 2020b, p. 27). The updated version of the National Action Plan on Integration (Federal Government, 2020a, p. 33) recognizes that digitalization plays an important role in integration and that corresponding integration offers are being established and promoted; this also includes the development of digital tools for counselling in youth migration services, qualification of employees, online counselling centres and online information portals (Federal Government, 2020a, pp. 33, 36–37). In addition, the reach of social media and the merging of traditional and social media are considered, for example in the fields of education, language acquisition and voluntary work (Federal Government, 2020b, pp. 29f).

In academic empiricism, Digital Migration Studies – although not always under this term – have exerted their influence on various (sub-)disciplines for the past decade and a half. The trend of producing further knowledge and insights is increasing due to the growing importance of the Internet and an ongoing intertwining of the online and offline spheres. Examples of some articles which reveal the specifics of how postdigital developments have influenced integration affairs are represented and discussed in the following paragraphs.

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Discourses of Digital Migration Studies

Indeed, it is clear from a perusal of some of the literature from the area of Digital Migration Studies that many aspects of the integration/participation discourse require re-thinking. Referring to numerous empirical studies, Moran (2022) argues that migrants use digital technologies to access important information concerning citizenship, employment, education, language training, housing, banking, and healthcare upon arrival. Language acquisition is often mentioned at the forefront:

> In multiple studies participants divulged that they used digital media to learn the language of their host country, helping them to integrate more successfully. Platforms and tools such as YouTube and Google Translate provide recently arrived migrants with easily accessible and cost-effective private language tuition. (Moran, 2022, p. 9)

Arnold et al. (2017) contribute to understanding the prominent role that smartphones play for migrants during and after the migration process in Germany. The smartphone is captured as a local object that simultaneously expresses and shapes global relations and transnational migration movements, to and within Europe. Following arrival in the destination country, smartphones enable navigation in the new context, as well as various forms of participation (Arnold et al., 2017, p. 6). Smartphones facilitate migrants' self-organization, autonomy and participation in various ways: searching for information regarding travel and arrival countries, keeping in touch with friends, family and other migrants, taking online language courses, making use of translator apps, and dealing with the challenges of daily life. According to Arnold et al. (2017), the smartphone becomes an instrument of integration into the new host society (p. 5).

Ponzanesi (2021) and Alinejad and Ponzanesi (2021) examine the structural participation of Somali migrant women living in different European cities (London, Amsterdam, Rome) and how they use digital media in their everyday lives. The focus is on the intersection of Internet usage with gender dynamics in relation to questions of origin, religion and education (Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 8). The results show, on the one hand, that local communities are in a way social hubs that create new communication spaces and practices and, on the other hand, that everyday media life in the context of international mobility across continental borders is often shaped by postcolonial confrontation (see:

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Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2021). Furthermore, the use of digital media seems to primarily reflect considerations of social positioning within local spaces and transnational networks that potentially support social participation, e.g. through access to education and resources for their children, and through social support from other migrant women in similar situations (see: Alinejad & Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 30). Ponzanesi (2021, p. 8) concludes that the Internet affects the sense of belonging and the way social groupings are formed as well as opening additional options, especially for women and in environments outside of their home country (see: Ponzanesi, 2021, p. 8).

The cultural participation of migrants is shown in an empirical analysis by Nedelcu (2020), which was conducted over a period of fifteen years with Romanian migrants in Canada and Switzerland. According to her, information and communication technologies facilitate the co-presence of mobile actors in different places, enable new forms of intergenerational solidarity in transnational families and promote networked forms of mobilization and cohesion at a distance. The case study shows that in the migration context, the Internet becomes a tool of social innovation that challenges traditional notions of borders, space, time and mobility. Everyday socializing practices create meaningful relationships, even if the exchange of content is not particularly significant. Nevertheless, this creates a feeling of permanent belonging and reduces geographical and emotional discontinuities (Nedelcu, 2020, p. 346).

Atay and D'Silva (2019) highlight how social media have made it possible to stay in touch with friends and families "at local levels" from two points of view: In the diaspora but also in the home country (e.g. by maintaining close and even live contact on a regular basis). Prieto Peral's study (2018) is connected to this argumentation. She examines how members of the higher-educated Spanish middle class, who emigrated following the 2008 crisis, network on social media in the diaspora community, with members of the host society and with people living in the home country. She examines how groups are formed and how people talk about themselves, the destination country and their country of origin. The study shows that social media is a space which allows for the linguistic interpretation and understanding of biographies (Prieto Peral, 2018, pp. 211–212). Besides, the connection to the country of origin is intensified by social media, especially by the maintenance of contact with one's family. This sheds light on the possibilities but also the obstacles to identificatory participation (with the host society), as some migrants embrace the challenges of their new environments while others locate their cultural identity in the exclusion of being a migrant (Prieto Peral, 2018, pp. 209–210).

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Furthermore, Costa and Alinejad (2020) examine the ways in which identificatory participation takes shape through the use of social media. Two generations of Kurdish migrants living in Milan are portrayed, and the use of social media is presented and compared. The research shows that home has become a mediated experience that takes shape through everyday social media practices (Costa and Alinejad, 2020, p. 1). Above all, social media forms a kind of new home for Kurdish migrants, in which ethnic and political identities are shaped and formed. The authors argue that home is a "digitally mediated experience" (Costa and Alinejad, 2020, p. 1), and therefore takes place onsite, on the Internet.

6. Discussion: The Role of Digitalization for the Dimensions of Integration...

...on a Structural, Social and Cultural Level

Systematically, structural, social and cultural integration is the same in both the country of origin and the host society: It consists of participation in work, school, housing, health etc. (*structural dimension*); family, friendship, leisure time etc. (*social dimension*); and language and cultural knowledge *(cultural dimension*). As the previous chapter has shown, in all of these dimensions, the Internet harbours a deep potential for the improvement of participation indicators for migrants, finally potentially levelling them to the overall social average. More and more often, the Internet even seems to be the tool of choice in fostering participation. This applies in particular to those areas in which the participation of migrants has been hindered due to a lack of system knowledge, a lack of networks and a lack of language skills. Via digital media, barriers can be broken down and the unfamiliarity of the new social, political, cultural, linguistic and economic reality can be better compensated.

The Internet is a platform for the exchange of information and ultimately the learning space for the acquisition of key competences for participation in a structural, social and cultural dimension. Established migrants play an important role here in providing core knowledge, also in a virtual environment. As seen in the prior sections and subsections, establishing networks would appear to be a central motivation for the use of social media: "Anyone who is part of this network has more opportunities to obtain information, to get in touch with other members of society and to join forces with them" (Kissau, 2008, p. 199).

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Their reference systems consist of established migrants who have already had similar experiences. These are mostly found within the diasporic community. In the past, they were mainly found in migrant organizations, but also simply in the neighbourhood; today they can in addition be found (self-organized and not necessarily institutionally connected) on the Internet.

... on an Identificatory Level

Identificatory integration seems to be the least investigated, as – in contrast to the others – it is difficult or, perhaps, impossible to measure identificatory indicators, in contrast to, for example, the employment rate (*structural integration indicator*), the engagement rate (*social integration indicator*) or language proficiency (*cultural integration indicator*). The Internet, especially in its function as an exchange platform, e.g. via social media, can potentially help to accumulate social capital.

However, a distinction should be made between *bonding* and *bridging* social capital. Bonding social capital strengthens connections within an already existing group, which often tends to be homogenous, while bridging social capital creates new connections to people outside the established in-group (Putnam, 2000, p. 22). Following the aforementioned state of knowledge, we may definitely notice that – for migrants – digital media play a role primarily for the acquisition of the former type of capital – bonding – and only secondarily for the latter – bridging. On an identificatory level, the Internet is not necessarily used for networking with the host society, but rather offers unprecedented opportunities to maintain connections with the networks of the country of origin and the diaspora community, especially family and friends.

Even if the Internet offers a wide range of communication possibilities, migrants primarily use the Internet to communicate with people of the same origin (*bonding*). As early as 1995, Poster (in Ponzanesi, 2020, p. 984) stated: "Oppressed, minority or endangered groups, often organized in diasporas, use the Internet to keep up with their homeland and native culture, thus strengthening their ethnic ties and lessening their isolation." In this way, the Internet, although a modern technology, can even contribute to preserving older traditions from the material world. But also a transformation of diaspora communities may be observed as taking place; they are transformed into *digital diasporas* (Candidatu et al. 2019, p. 34). Some of these networks are even based solely on online contacts. Thus, acquaintances which are made within the online network may be, but do not have to be, transferred to the material world. This di-

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versity of potential for the digital diaspora gives them greater opportunities in terms of stability and social importance (see: Düvel, 2016, p. 9) and, thanks to the possibilities of modern digital technologies, migrants may live at a local level in 'two worlds' simultaneously: in their country of origin and in the host society.

7. Conclusion

The paradigm of 'integration at a local level' is directly based on a notion that embeds integration in a material, physical locality. Even though the recognition of the importance of the physical locality as a lifewide learning space (schools, neighbours, sports clubs etc.) for integration still obviously has its importance, a new layer has to be applied, drawn from an increasingly postdigital world: In the view of media digitization, social practices have been changing rapidly and challenge traditional ways of thinking, also in terms of integration practice. Castells (1996, quoted in Haslett, 2019, p. 22) has even argued that digital communication has changed "the fabric of social order."

In the lives of migrants, there are many situations where the Internet becomes the main and sometimes the only tool for dealing with problems arising from the relationship with reality that surrounds them – uncertain, frightening, strange, and sometimes incomprehensible. The overview of some empirical findings of Digital Migration Studies shows that nowadays modern (smart) communication technologies have reached a new, transnational dimension. Thanks to the possibilities of using Internet technologies, migrants can make experiences, stay updated and feel at home 'at a local level' in a triple hybrid sense: in the new host society, in their country of origin, and in the diaspora community of the host society. They can maintain real-time-relationships with their families and take part in social, cultural, and political life in two (or more) countries simultaneously. For migrants, the Internet is a factor of importance in constantly (re-)constructing their identity. In addition to the possibilities offered by the Internet for the structural, social, and cultural dimension, for the identificatory dimension it facilitates vast possibilities for migrants to stay in touch with their country of origin and makes it easier to connect to migrants in the same region (digital diaspora). Accordingly, the Internet may have different effects on the process of migrants' identificatory integration. Here is a key and also a desideratum to expand knowledge regarding the provision of offers or opportunities to develop hybrid forms of identification, that – using

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the potentials of the Internet – develop identities which are based on two (or more) cultures.

The paradigm 'integration takes place at a local level' would therefore benefit from an extension of the local-level concept. Today, more than ever, the idea of being 'at a local level' also embraces the Internet, embedded as it generally is with our daily routines. In other words, following the social geographer John Urry (2000) who stated at the turn of the millennium that online people "still meet face-to-face, but under new conditions of both 'meet' and 'face'" (p. 74), we accordingly suggest that integration continues to take place 'at a local level', but with a new connotation of what 'a local level' can mean in a postdigital world.

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Buddy-Culture Goes Viral

Meaning and Potentiality of the Buddy-Approach in and Outside Formal Educational Settings

Luisa Conti, Janice Darmanin, Christine Fenech and Klara Räthel

Abstract *The buddy-system is a concept which has become quite popular in the last few decades, although a systematic review of the scientific literature regarding it still does not exist. This chapter seeks to close this gap and investigates the characteristics of the buddy approach and the goals towards which the buddy-system has been oriented. In order to do so this chapter builds on findings from a systematic literature review on peer buddy systems and integrates them with empirical data collected on buddy-schemes in Germany. These inform recommendations for the development of buddy systems in different educational contexts (formal, informal, and non-formal). In order to consider the most recent application of the buddy-system, the chapter displays the hybrid concept developed by the Horizon 2020 project KIDS4ALLL (Key Inclusive Development Strategies for Lifelong Learning) in order to disseminate the buddy-culture transnationally. Particular attention will be given to the strategic potential of the buddy-system for fostering social inclusion of migrant youth.*

Keywords *Buddy; Peer-Learning; E-Learning; Intercultural Education; Migrant Students*

1. Introduction

Everyone should have the right to quality and inclusive learning opportunities and to contribute to education throughout their life (Council of the European Union, 2018; European Commission, 2021). This is crucial, particularly, for migrant students, who often acquire lower levels of academic achievement and are more frequently among those leaving school early (Eurydice, 2019,

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p. 38–40), which influences their life chances and places them at an increased risk of discrimination, social isolation, and poverty (Pott et al., 2022). Facilitating migrants' access to and inclusion in educational systems is, therefore, one of the most significant societal challenges to reduce the discrepancy in life chances between migrant and non-migrant students. In this regard, increasing the migrant students' language proficiency and their feeling of belonging, on the one hand, and teachers' and educators' ability to address their needs holistically on the other have been identified as key factors in supporting their academic achievement (Eurydice, 2019). This links well with the objective set by the Council of the European Union (2018, p. 1) towards strengthening "Europe's resilience in a time of rapid and profound change" through "supporting people across Europe in gaining the skills and competences needed for personal fulfillment, health, employability and social inclusion". Towards this goal it has identified the importance of the promotion of eight "Key Competences for Lifelong Learning" (European Commission 2019): These include personal, social and learning-to-learn competences; STEM; language; cultural; citizenship; literacy; entrepreneurship; and digital competences.

Effective measures for addressing and overcoming challenges linked to learning and social relations faced by members of vulnerable groups are peer learning concepts (Manzoni & Rolfe, 2019). Indeed, they have been proven to enhance the acceptance of differences, to foster a greater sense of belonging, and to promote the development of more inclusive learning communities (Baloche & Brody, 2017). Peer learning approaches have become increasingly popular in recent decades, as they foster learning motivation and, in addition to developing subject related competences, promote socio-emotional skills, friendship, and therefore well-being (Jordan & Le Métais, 1997; Muumbate et al., 2020; Carvalho & Santos, 2021). Peer learning approaches could, thus, be effective in transmitting the key competences highlighted above and strengthening interpersonal relationships in different educational settings and modes of learning and, hence, addressing the societal challenge of differences in life chances between migrant and non-migrant youth. This is what the Horizon 2020 innovation project KIDS4ALLL (Key Inclusive Development Strategies for Lifelong Learning) aims to explore. In order to foster the social inclusion of migrant students, the international consortium is developing a multilingual e-learning platform[1] through which teachers and educators may increase

1 The foreseen launch is March 2024: https://learn.kids4alll.eu/. For a more detailed description of the platform and its pedagogical framework, see: Conti & Szabó (2024).

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their ability to offer quality education to all their students and, at the same time, young people may develop, in tight collaboration with a buddy, their competences in the eight key areas, strengthening their relationship to their class and community. Indeed, despite abundant research on the benefits of peer learning, research on the specific form of peer learning called the buddy-system has actually remained limited, also including its application in formal, informal, and non-formal educational settings and specifically through the use of e-learning. The project seeks to fill this gap.

This chapter presents the results of an extensive literature review and an empirical study conducted in the first year of the project surrounding the buddy-system and integrates this with a description of the concept, developed in the framework of the KIDS4ALLL project, aiming towards the dissemination of buddy-culture through digital media. The research adopted a sequential approach. In the first part (sections 2–4), this chapter investigates the characteristics of buddy-systems, their suitability for various educational settings (formal, non-formal, or informal education), modes of learning (digital or traditional), and for facilitating the inclusion of migrant students. This part starts with a description of the methodology used and ends with recommendations for the development of buddy systems in diverse educational settings. In the last part of the chapter (section 5), we describe the strategies developed in the framework of the Horizon 2020 innovation project KIDS4ALLL, aiming to promote inclusion by disseminating the buddy-culture through its e-learning platform.

2. Methodology

The search strategy for the systematic literature review included peer-reviewed literature retrieved from Sage and Proquest based on the keywords buddy, buddy system and peer buddy. Only peer-reviewed literature in the area of education and social sciences, published in English and with the main focus of the paper being on the buddy approach, were considered for inclusion. The initial search, which took place in March 2022, yielded forty-nine papers with publication dates as outlined in Table 1. Following screening, ten papers were excluded as they did not meet any of the criteria of peer-review, did not relate to a buddy system applied in an educational or social scientific context, or the paper did not actually focus on the buddy system. Thus, thirty-nine papers were considered in the systematic literature review. The analyzed

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buddy-programmes were mainly situated in the USA (n=27), Australia (n=3), and Canada (n=2), while three papers reported on initiatives based in Italy, the United Kingdom, and Indonesia, and four papers analyzed buddy initiatives in general without any specific geographic location.

Table 1: Profile of Papers in the Systematic Literature Review

Year of Publication	Number of Papers in Initial Search	Number of Papers Following Exclusion
Prior to 1990	1	1
1990–1999	8	8
2000–2009	18	14
2010–2019	17	13
2020 onwards	4	2
n.d.	1	1
Total	49	39

In the same period, initiatives focusing on migrant inclusion and self-reportedly drawing on buddy-schemes were identified in eight countries. Their project managers, educators, and project participants were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews to understand the characteristics of the specific buddy approach, challenges experienced regarding its implementation, and the factors relating to success. The analysis in this chapter is restricted to the data collected in Germany, which reflects the results obtained in the other countries. This focus allows for more detailed insights and analysis of commonalities and differences in the analyzed buddy approaches. Six organizations were identified, as indicated in Table 2, and were then invited to participate in the semi-structured interviews.

The interviews were conducted with, in total, 16 persons: eight were people involved in the project management (at least one per project), three of them working also directly with the project participants; two were educators engaged in one of the projects; six were participants taking part in two of the researched actions. All participants were between the ages of fourteen and twenty-three years of age at the time of the interview (May-August 2021), and four of the participants had a migratory background, meaning they had

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migrated themselves. Overall, eight individual interviews (project managers (4), participants (4)) and four team interviews were conducted (project manager teams (2), educator teams (1), buddy teams (1)). Due to COVID-19 eight of the interviews were conducted online and three in person. On average, the interviews lasted for forty-eight minutes (the longest interview was sixty-nine minutes, the shortest lasted eighteen minutes).

All interviews were conducted in German by two researchers. One of the interviewers (female, circa 40 years old, migratory background – Europe) was responsible for introducing the KIDS4ALLL project and its goals and contextualizing the interviews. The other researcher (female, circa 30 years old, German) conducted the semi-structured interviews based on the interview guideline. All interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed following the simple transcription system (Dresing & Pehl, 2011). These transcripts and the notes taken during the interviews formed the basis for the analysis of the interviews, using inductive category formation and summarizing content analysis (Mayring, 2010).

Table 2: Interviewed Peer Buddy Initiatives in Germany

Initiative	**Profile**
Programme A	Initiated by a private foundation that works nationwide with schools training children and young adults as buddies, in a social integration and special needs framework.
Programme B	Initiated by a private foundation that works nationwide training children and young adults to support their peers. It focuses specifically on transitional periods, e.g. from kindergarten to school, or from primary to secondary school.
Programme C	Part of and funded by a university's sports framework, refugee students are invited and supported by their peers to take part in sports classes and to create social connections in that environment.
Programme D	Initiated and funded by one specific city, young refugees and people with a migratory background are paired with other young people (mostly without a migratory background) to receive support with school work.

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Initiative	Profile
Programme E	Initiated in twenty seven primary and secondary schools of a large city and funded by the city in cooperation with a private agency, the project involves children and students offering their help in typical everyday challenges concerning school life.
Programme F	Funded by different public institutions and organized by a local association offering different classes and leisure time activities, young refugees are invited and trained to form buddy-teams for networking and mutual support.

3. Results

In this section we summarize the results, comparing the literature review with the in-depth interviews conducted in Germany. They are organized in relation to seven dimensions: the educational settings; the socio-demographic profile of participants; the types of interventions; the definition of the buddy approach; the composition of the buddy teams; the key requirements for successful buddy-systems; and the modes of learning.

Educational Settings

The analysis of the papers in the systematic literature review revealed a prevalence of initiatives based on the buddy approach particularly in primary education (n=21). They were witnessed less often in pre-primary (n=13) and secondary education (n=13). It has to be borne in mind that buddy systems often involve more than one educational setting with buddies in the same initiative often being of different ages and, hence, enrolled at different levels of education. Buddy systems least often were organized in higher education settings (n=1) or with the engagement of community partners (n=1). Nearly all papers (n=38) reported on buddy systems initiated in formal educational settings, while one paper focused on a buddy approach in a non-formal setting.

The initiatives selected in Germany involved programmes implemented in formal settings (Programmes C and E) and non-formal settings (Programmes D and F), and as a collaboration between formal and non-formal settings (Programmes A and B). Given the focus of the Horizon 2020 project KIDS4ALLL, which aims at supporting the inclusion of migrant youth of compulsory

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school age, the research on buddy systems carried out in the same project, which forms the basis for the qualitative data reviewed in this chapter, focused mainly on this target group. Hence, programmes investigated targeted mainly children of primary and secondary school age with the exception of Programme C, which represented a buddy initiative in higher education, and Programme F which also involved older young adults.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Participants

Buddy approaches investigated in the systematic literature review targeted most often students with learning difficulties (literacy programmes – n=10; academic skills programmes – n=9); students with disabilities or other conditions influencing learning (n=11) or students experiencing challenges with social inclusion (new entrant programmes – n=5; social inclusion programmes – n=8; social skills programmes – n=5). No buddy programmes targeted specifically the inclusion of migrant students. However, many papers were not sufficiently explicit regarding the profile of participants in these programmes, which makes an evaluation difficult, since participants in social inclusion programmes may have included migrant students. Indeed, two programmes, one of which was a social integration programme, indicated that it involved non-native speakers.

In contrast, all projects included in the interviews conducted in Germany with managers, educators, and participants of initiatives built around the buddy approach focused on the inclusion of migrant youth. This is due to the focus of KIDS4ALLL, though this suggests also that both formal and non-formal educational settings are suitable for buddy initiatives aimed at the inclusion of migrant youth, though community engagement appears to play a stronger role in non-formal educational settings than in the buddy approaches investigated in the systematic literature review. At the same time, non-formal settings may also provide the structural and financial support required to sustain projects which retain social inclusion as their main objective.

Types of Interventions

Overall, the reviewed articles presented buddy approaches that can be differentiated into three intervention types as indicated in Table 3, namely skills programmes, social inclusion programmes, and special needs programmes. While skills programmes focus on providing specific support to individuals

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with both literacy or academic skills needs as well as social skills needs, social inclusion programmes are aimed at providing orientation, integration, or remedial programmes focused on including the participating individuals in a specific setting. Finally, special needs programmes are specifically designed to foster the inclusion of individuals with disabilities or other conditions, such as autism. All interventions based on the buddy approach tend to be driven by a perceived 'limitation' or 'deficit', such as literacy challenges or a lack of interaction of individuals with special needs with their peers. In response, the buddy initiative serves as remedial or preventive action. Moreover, buddy-programmes tend to be initiated and sustained by individuals forming part of the formal education setting in which they are implemented rather than by the target population addressed by them.

Table 3: Intervention Types of Programmes Based on the Buddy Approach

Skills Programmes	Social Inclusion Programmes	Special Needs Programmes
Literacy Programmes ("book buddies") (n=10)	Orientation Programmes (new entrants) (n=5)	Students with Disabilities or other Conditions (n=11)
Academic Skills Programmes (n=9)	Remedial and Integration Programmes ("buddy bench", anti-bullying programmes, intergenerational exchange) (n=8)	
Social Skills Programmes (n=5)		

Definition of the Buddy Approach

The buddy initiatives selected in Germany aimed at the inclusion of migrant youth and, therefore, were predominantly focused on social inclusion (Programmes A, C and F). Although programmes B and E also consider social inclusion as a central aim, they focus on the difficulties that students may have at school, e.g. in the transition phases, aiming through the buddy-system to indirectly support their performance. Only one of the programmes was focused primarily on skills development, as it aimed at improving the performance of

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project participants in school (Programme D). It appears, therefore, that the buddy-system is perceived as an important instrument against social exclusion, though not frequently connected to the development of skills. The research also shows that these initiatives were structured differently depending on the overall goal of the programme, primarily if the learning intention referred to skills attainment or was focused on the social inclusion of migrant youth.

The systematic literature review identified the lack of a clear differentiation between the buddy approach and the peer-learning concept. Nevertheless, from the literature review key characteristics associated with the buddy approach included: *solidarity*, *empathy*, and *curiosity* as specific character traits and triggers for the participants to engage in the buddy initiative. It also revealed a *focus on mutual interest* and *mutual learning*. However, learning appeared subservient to collaboration, with initiatives focused on skills development, such as literacy or other academic skills programmes, stressing the learning element more strongly. That being said, elements of learning forming part of the buddy-initiative were designed in a dialogic manner[2], i.e. they stressed not only the importance of mutual learning, but the enrichment which grounds on the differences of the buddies involved in the initiative.

This corresponds with findings from the interviews conducted in Germany with buddy initiatives focused on the inclusion of migrant youth. These buddy systems, like the buddy approaches included in the systematic literature review, were based on the principle of a symmetrical relationship between the buddies characterized by openness, respect, and curiosity towards the other and their uniqueness, but also solidarity. The specific differences between the members of the buddy team, such as difference in age, level of education or specific skills, such as language proficiency, did not in general negatively affect the perceived symmetry of the relationship, but served as a spark to trigger curiosity between the partners. The experience of being a buddy has been described also by the interviewees as enriching for *all* participants.

Composition of the Buddy Teams

The buddy schemes analyzed in the systematic literature review involved both buddy partners of the same age as well as different aged partners (younger and

2 The understanding of the dialogic approach, as used here, is informed by the interdisciplinary study on the definition of dialogue conducted by Conti (2012).

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older buddy). The vast majority of buddy systems included pairings of students with students. However, in a few instances pairings of students with teachers or with members of the community, as well as teachers with teachers were reported. Buddy initiatives were generally based on pairings of one to one. However, instances were also reported of pairings of one to many, e.g. a student with a disability or other condition and their peers in the class. Pairings of one to many appeared suitable in inclusive initiatives taking place in larger settings. This seems to allow for flexibility and continuity of the initiative in the case that one of the buddies were to become (temporarily) unavailable. The buddy initiatives analyzed in the selected literature also included pairings of many to many. These were common in teacher-led initiatives with pairings of whole classes of different levels of education and generally complementary to one-to-one pairings of student-student and teacher-teacher as part of the same initiative. In those instances, the whole class pairing took place in specific stages of the project that involved the induction phase at the beginning of the project, or the reflection phase at the end of the project.

These findings are in line with the findings from the interviews, which also identified pairings of the same age as well as of different ages (older buddy with younger buddy). The different programmes run different pairing-formats: pairings one to one (Programmes C and D), one to two (Programme B), and many to many (Programmes A and E). At the same time, the interviews also revealed that the buddy approach does not always need to have a fixed pairing format in terms of number, nor a specific orientation to specific profiles, nor in relation to the objective of the buddyship. The buddy-approach can be just lived as a *culture* permeating a certain group: The members of the group absorb the dialogic attitude on which the buddy-system is rooted and express it in terms of the enrichment of eye-level relationships. Buddy-teams emerge in this context spontaneously, on the basis of the needs and interests of the group members who become buddies for a certain project, often helping one another to reach a certain goal (Programme F).

Key Requirements for Successful Buddy-Systems

The literature review has led to the identification of some core factors which have a positive impact on buddy-systems. Some of these are related to the facilitator of the initiative, some to the condition under which the buddy-system takes place. Among the first factors is the *clear commitment of the initiators* of the intervention and their ability to manage the process, including the delicate task

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of elaborating the profiles of the participants in order to match them correctly and to organize trainings and offer support mechanisms. Particularly important seems to be the *initial training*, in which the participants are introduced to the buddy approach and develop basic skills, although the pedagogic and material support given to the buddies throughout the process is also relevant, e.g. in the form of counselling and through the provision of learning materials. A specific challenge highlighted in the literature is the insufficient preparation of the students in relation to the display of their agency and their ability to take on the role of experts, switching from the role of learner to that of mentor. This implies the need to convey concepts with their own words and codes to their peers and, most importantly, to enrich the learning contents with their own knowledge, which actually represents the real added value, as it originates from their own individual experience in their lifeworld. In relation to the conditions under which the buddies collaborate, particular importance is given to the *place* where the buddies meet, which must be available, easily accessible, and adequate to the tasks and objectives. Moreover the literature highlights the relevance of a clear outline of *the duration of the intervention* (e.g. one scholastic year) as well as the specification of the *frequency of the meetings*.

These factors were also mentioned in the interviews, in which the success and sustainability of the project has been linked to the commitment of the responsible persons, to the institutional support and recognition given to the programme and to the presence of structures ensuring long-term continuity. The prevalence of buddy systems in formal educational settings appears to confirm the importance of institutional settings and frameworks for the successful implementation of such initiatives. The interviewees also pointed out that while professionals are generally expected to have the necessary skills to implement the project and its aims, the participants need preparation before entering the programme. The selected initiatives undertake this through informal exchange (Programme D), while in a few cases an initial workshop summarizes the principal aspects (Programmes A, B, C and E). In all programmes the buddy-teams receive support in the form of counselling. In this way their well-being is ensured as well as the general positive development of the buddyship. Four out of the six programmes (Programmes A, B, E and F) also offer tailor-made training units throughout the process to allow the buddies to develop the hard and soft skills needed for accomplishing their buddyship. The data collected through qualitative research confirm that adequate conditions in relation to space and time are fundamental for good collaboration; indeed all programmes with one-to-one and one-to-two schemes make sure their par-

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ticipants fix their collaboration in terms of frequency and duration at the beginning of their buddyship.

Modes of Learning

Nearly all of the programmes analyzed in the reviewed studies (n=38) implemented their buddy-system through traditional learning modes and face-to-face interaction. Only one initiative reported buddy interactions and peer-learning via digital media. The buddy-programmes examined in Germany were specifically designed to promote buddy-systems on-site. During the Covid-19 Pandemic most of these had to stop, except Programmes B and D which supported the continuation of the buddyship through digital media. Digital forms of the buddy-system, in which collaboration takes place online as well as in hybrid formats – i.e. in which the buddy-collaboration on-site is guided by an e-learning platform, as is the case in the KIDS4ALLL project – remain underexplored in the literature and underutilized in practice.

4. Recommendations for the Development of Buddy-Systems

It is evident from the systematic literature review and the findings from the interviews that the buddy-approach can be expressed in various types of buddy-systems, which may be shaped according to one of the following three schemes: pairings of one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many. The buddy-system must be conceived on the basis of the objectives of the specific initiative, the context in which it is going to take place as well as the needs of the participants involved. Moreover, the outcomes of both our meta-analysis and empirical study show that a core characteristic of the buddy-approach is the balanced relationship of the buddies despite their different positions, e.g. with/without disability, with more/less language proficiency. The dialogic attitude which buddies are invited to assume allows them to understand this experience as an enrichment for all, beyond its character grounded in solidarity. Indeed everyone has strengths and weaknesses, therefore *all* buddies are encouraged to share their knowledge, perspectives, and skills and can, in this way, learn from each other while building a positive interpersonal relationship.

As participants have different degrees of dialogic competence, it is important to support them from the beginning with training, counselling, and ade-

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quate materials as well as with practical issues which may arise. The intention is to stimulate collaboration and to help participants create a relationship in which they all feel free to express their opinion, to display their creativity, and to discuss their feelings in different situations, including those which are induced by conflict. In order to avoid frustration and ensure the participants' well-being, it might be useful to ask the buddies to start with the joint elaboration of their principles of collaboration, which may also include mediation strategies to be applied in the case that conflict arises. Setting a clear frame to the collaboration, also in terms of place, time, and joint objectives can favour the development of a buddyship whose members feel comfortable and motivated.

The data highlights that buddy-teams need the competent support of teachers and educators, who are however not necessarily specifically prepared for this task. As the buddy-approach questions their traditional role, it requires specific knowledge, skills and attitudes which transcend the pure commitment and might differ from the ones they have trained until then. Moreover the findings show that the commitment of the person in charge is not enough even in relation to the programme's sustainability, which is instead favored by its institutionalization.

5. Implementation of the Buddy Approach Within KIDS4ALLL

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the Horizon 2020 project KIDS4ALLL aims to foster social inclusion of migrant youth through addressing their needs holistically. In order to reach this goal, various strategies interweave in its design. Firstly, the concept combines the promotion of key competences with peer-learning, promoting simultaneously in this way cognitive, behavioural, and social development. Secondly, the project's output is not just dedicated to migrant students, but it is for *all* students and also for teachers and educators, all of them being citizens who together constitute their community and who shape the future jointly. Thirdly, KIDS4ALLL is based on a special form of peer-learning, that is the buddy-system, whose dialogic character puts into focus differences, while at the same time balances relationships. Fourthly, it also considers teachers' and educators' learning needs and invites them to satisfy these needs themselves, in exchange with a buddy. Fifthly, it acknowledges that learning does not just happen lifelong but also *lifewide;* the project's output is therefore designed to be useful also in non-formal and in-

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formal educational settings. Finally, in order to reach its target-groups, the project exploits the advantages offered by digitality and its output is conceived to be multimedial, multilingual, and accessible in any location. Nevertheless in order to stick to its goal, the project keeps the focus on the local reality of the users and stimulates collaboration on-site.

While the first five strategies refer to contents discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, the last one has just been touched upon, as we have observed that the vast majority of the (meta-)analyzed initiatives takes place on-site, without involving any strategic use of digital means. Considering that the engagement with digital media has become ever more pervasive, a major gap between merely analog didactic offers of the buddy-approach and post-digital lifeworlds[3] seems to exist. KIDS4ALLL aims to contribute to the innovation of educational design through its hybrid concept, meaning thus the creation of an e-learning platform which stimulates buddy-interaction in place. This multimedia platform should make learning more accessible and appealing for learners of the postdigital society and at the same time disseminate widely the buddy-culture. This implies overcoming a core challenge: How to make this platform successful in different world regions? The project developed a twofold tactic in order to harmonize standardization with localization. On the one hand, the contents, the format, and the design are inspired by quasi-universal trends, so that once translated they should be easily usable and understandable by the speakers of 13 languages, among which there is Arabic, English, French and Spanish. On the other hand, the didactic concept according to which its content is structured and presented leaves space for localization, giving the buddy-teams themselves the task of involving in their exchange, knowledge which is meaningful to them. We will now show how this concept is to be realized by describing the KIDS4ALLL e-learning platform.

The KIDS4ALLL e-learning platform is organized in three areas, namely the *know.what* area, the *know.how* area and the *work.it* area. In the *know.what* area, children, adolescents, and young adults find content aimed at stimulating their buddy-collaboration. The content is presented in the form of thematic units which start with a warm-up, usually an interactive quiz, then offers the

3 In this context, 'postdigital lifeworlds'draw upon Cramer's interpretation of the term "postdigital" (2014), signifying contemporary lifeworlds characterized by extensive digitalization. It denotes the pervasive integration of digital media into our daily lives, wherein digital tools and platforms have become commonplace for various aspects of everyday existence.

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buddies specific input on the topic with a task to solve together. It afterwards proposes to them at least one creative task that leads participants to produce their own content, and ends with a reflection which they can also share online in form of a digital postcard. The content transmitted in this area focuses particularly on the acquisition of the eight key competences for lifelong learning, which are considered, as mentioned in the introduction, as crucial to addressing the societal challenge of differences in life chances between migrant and non-migrant youth. Moreover, in order to also provide teachers and educators with the competences they need to act and design their lessons and projects in a more inclusive way, there is a dedicated *know.what* area for them. The contents are structured in the same manner as for the youth: With a warm-up exercise, a specific input, practical transfer-tasks, and a reflection. Content-wise, however, the know.what area relates to collaborative learning, socio-emotional skills, global competence as well as dialogic and intercultural competence. For both target groups, the learning units in the know.what area have been designed towards the development of the learners in three domains: The cognitive domain, through transmission of knowledge; the behavioural, through the facilitation of skills training; and the emotional domain, through the promotion of specific attitudes.

The *know.how* area provides users with video-tutorials of two-three minutes each, that intend to stimulate buddy-collaboration and support this from the beginning to the end. Ten tutorials are dedicated to the students and outline how they can conceive, manage, and successfully realize with their buddy a joint project, the project being the production of educational content. The tutorials refer exclusively to a one-to-one buddy scheme, as it fosters maximum active participation of both buddies and favours the development of their personal relationship. In line with the recommendation developed out of the findings, the buddy teams are encouraged to talk from the beginning of their buddyship about their collaboration and set goals related to how they can effectively work together, based on their mutual expectations. These ten tutorials deal, therefore, with teamwork but also with design thinking, project management, pedagogic content elaboration, inclusion and diversity issues, as well as content presentation and recording. As educators and teachers play a central role in the promotion of self-determined, dialogic, and creative buddy-collaborations, ten tutorials have been produced specifically for them. These aim to help in the building of matching buddy-teams, to develop an adequate framework in which they can work, and finally to support their creative and collaborative processes. The tutorials are, therefore, on participatory project man-

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agement, team-building, dialogic facilitation as well as on the transmitting of know-how useful to support their buddy-teams in the production of their content in the context of KIDS4ALLL, and beyond.

In the *work.it* area buddy-teams can upload and publish – with permission and support of their teacher/educator – content related to one of the eight key competences which they have jointly created. This area of the platform is therefore a sort of participatory archive for educational content and extends the KIDS4ALLL peer-learning experience further, allowing buddy-teams to learn thanks to contents previously produced by other buddy-teams. The opportunity given to any and every buddy-team to share content on this platform has a further interesting implication: It makes the platform a lively place in which users can leave their traces and perceive the presence of others. As the material published in this area does not go through an automatic selection based on language, the users come into contact with multimedia content in several different languages. The *work.it* area is therefore a space in which users may experience their first conscious contact with other languages and indirectly with peers living in other regions. This connection, even if mediated, may strengthen a sense of belonging to the multilingual, transnational world community. By making buddy-culture 'go viral', the KIDS4ALLL e-learning platform promotes the development of stronger ties among young people, members of the same local community as well as positive connections among young citizens of the world.

6. Conclusion

Universal access to and the enjoyment of high-quality, inclusive learning opportunities is a fundamental right. Research shows that this is not yet the reality and that young migrants are particularly prone to experiencing diminished academic performance and face an elevated risk of school dropout. This is linked with numerous factors, though a key role is played by language proficiency, social exclusion, as well as the insufficient ability of many teachers and educators to address their needs holistically. This chapter delved into the potential of the buddy-approach to foster social inclusion and outlined the strategies pursued by the Horizon 2020 innovation project KIDS4ALLL, which seeks to enhance the inclusion of migrant students by synergizing the buddy-approach with the development of key competences for students, as well as for teachers and educators.

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In the framework of this project, funded by the European Commission, we have first conducted a systematic literature review on the buddy-approach and an empirical qualitative study on buddy-initiatives in Germany. Their findings, presented in this chapter, have provided a comprehensive insight into the current state of implementation of the buddy approach, shedding light on how it has been executed thus far. Based on the results derived from our (meta)analysis, we have formulated key recommendations for designing initiatives centred around this concept, which have been seamlessly integrated in the KIDS4ALLL output. In the following, we summarize the main findings and reflect on the strategies developed by KIDS4ALLL to make the buddy-culture 'go viral'.

While the buddy approach may lack a formal, explicit definition, it is commonly understood as a type of supportive and mutually beneficial connection among a select group of individuals marked by a dialogic attitude. In this approach, buddies engage in a balanced relationship that allows them to express their individuality and enhance their personal growth through meaningful interactions with one another. The buddy approach can manifest itself in various forms, including one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many configurations, often coordinated by an experienced individual responsible for the initiative. However, the buddy approach does not inherently require a pre-organized structure in which to thrive. In cases where a buddy culture prevails within a group, buddy teams can spontaneously emerge based on shared projects and mutual interests.

While the systematic literature review primarily identified the prevalence of buddy initiatives in formal educational settings, insights gleaned from interviews with German buddy initiatives focused on migrant youth inclusion reveal that both formal and non-formal educational settings can effectively accommodate such programmes. Facilitating students' sense of inclusion and belonging within the (school) community not only boosts their motivation but also transforms them into active participants in the learning process. However, the potential of buddy approaches to foster inclusion and skill development remains under-explored across various educational settings (formal, non-formal, or informal) and modes of learning (digital or traditional). This observation is supported by findings from both the systematic literature review and interviews conducted with representatives of buddy initiatives dedicated to migrant inclusion.

The primary focus of KIDS4ALLL is to bridge this existing gap by promoting peer-learning in buddy teams in and outside the formal educational settings. To achieve this, the project harnesses the digital realm, which has thus

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far remained underutilized. An attractive and user-friendly platform is being developed to make learning *lifewide,* bringing individuals together and transforming strangers into buddies who learn from each other in their free time. In this manner, the project seeks to not only address the inclusion of migrant youth, but also to instill an active engagement of students in their own learning journey. By disseminating the buddy-culture online, KIDS4ALLL taps into the full potential of an increasingly diverse student population.

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Global Classroom

Postdigital Connecting Across Continents

Siobhan Brownlie

Abstract *This paper discusses a module entitled 'Global Classroom'. There are three participating universities: Le Mans Université, France where the module is part of the Masters in International Cultural Studies; the University of Pretoria, South Africa; and Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, São Paulo, Brazil; participants from the latter two universities are fourth year students in political science. In order to facilitate communication, the module operates via the video-conferencing platform Zoom. Each week focuses on a particular topic, for example, green action, media and misinformation, democracy in action, national elections and youth attitudes, with guest speakers, student presentations and discussion. The paper defines and is structured by four concepts/practices: "small cultures", "postdigitality", "virtual exchange", and "postdigital critical cosmopolitanism". The Global Classroom module is analyzed through the prism of these concepts/practices. With respect to virtual exchange and postdigital critical cosmopolitanism, it is found that the module partially equates with these concepts/practices. It is suggested that in future iterations of the module, particular choices with respect to topic and task design could better allow students to develop intercultural skills and self-reflection.*

Keywords *Global Classroom; Small Cultures; Virtual Exchange; Postdigitality; Critical Cosmopolitanism*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a case study that contributes to the critical examination of digital forms of global education that allow the creation of hybrid spaces connecting people, and knowledges internationally. The chapter discusses a university module titled "Global Classroom" that involves stu-

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dents from three continents and whose main aim is to broaden the students' knowledge, understanding, and outlook with regard to a range of political, social, and cultural issues through the encounter with different perspectives. The virtual exchange takes place via synchronous online classes. The Global Classroom module was set up by the University of Akron, Ohio, USA, and has been running since 2018. For the 2022 edition, which I took part in as a lecturer/facilitator and report on here, three universities collaborated: the University of Pretoria, South Africa; Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado (FAAP), São Paulo, Brazil; and Le Mans Université, France.

In this chapter, the module is examined through the prism of four concepts/practices: small cultures, postdigitality, virtual exchange, and postdigital critical cosmopolitanism. With regard to the latter two concepts/practices, virtual exchange and postdigital critical cosmopolitanism, I will focus on the extent to which the Global Classroom module reflected these concepts. In terms of research methodology for the study, there are several aspects. As a contributing teacher at Le Mans, I undertook participant observation for the duration of the module from March till May 2022 and subsequently reviewed the recordings of the classes. I made use of an earlier report on the module covering 2018–19 (Henwood & Thuynsma, 2019). This report was written for the purpose of application for a teaching excellence award at the University of Pretoria and as such focused on the establishment of the Global Classroom module in 2018–19 as an innovative pedagogical initiative. Finally, I undertook an anonymous survey with the 2022 group from Le Mans that asked students about their learning, experiences, attitudes, and suggestions.[1]

2. Small Cultures

Small cultures is a concept that applies to all social groupings and which was developed by Adrian Holliday (1999). A small culture refers to habitual patterned activities, behaviours, and understandings that emerge in specific ways

1 Ideally, the whole cohort of students from the three universities should have answered the questionnaire. However, the questionnaire actually played a dual role: It was not only undertaken for research purposes, but also in order to collect opinions from my students, the French students, who had expressed some concerns about the unit. Although there was a limited number of questionnaire responses (ten students answered out of eighteen in the group), they provide valuable insights into student reaction to the module.

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in a group. The initial impetus is a need for group cohesion; members of the group contribute information and influences to create meanings and rules; routinization of group activities occurs; the small culture is thus formed; and products such as artefacts are produced (Holliday, 1999, pp. 241, 249).

The Global Classroom participants comprising teachers, guest speakers, and students created a small culture that traversed continents, countries, institutions, disciplines, and languages in cyberspace and that devised and adopted practices to overcome any potential obstacles to teaching and learning collaboration in this hybrid digital space. The partnership of universities from South Africa, Brazil, and France meant that English, Portuguese, and French were the native languages of the students. As the participants were fourth year students, all had a proficient level of English, and so English was chosen as the lingua franca for the module with occasional use of the other languages. The interdisciplinary aspect stemmed from the fact that for the University of Pretoria and for FAAP, the students were from the discipline of political science (mainly majoring in international relations), and the students at Le Mans were enrolled on the Masters in International Cultural Studies which has a focus on literature and media. Given this disciplinary mix, it was decided that the unit would not be focused on theory, but rather on topics of current political and social interest that could be approached from various perspectives. Each week was devoted to a particular topic with the following titles: "Green Action: The Politics and Possibilities," "Media, Misinformation and Society," "Democracy in Action," "Public Services: Myth or Fact," "Elections 2022: Is Anyone Listening?", and "Actions Speak Louder than Words: What Have we Learnt About Good Governance?" (2022 syllabus).

In order to promote knowledge exchange and student participation, the format decided on for each session was a talk by a guest speaker on the weekly topic, student presentations on current events in their country that related to the weekly topic, and questions and discussion. Within this framework, the emergent nature of practices was evident in the on-going negotiation among staff and students concerning content and activities. For example, the topic relating to national elections evolved into a student-led discussion on youth attitudes towards participating in politics. Of course, for online teaching, effective and reliable technology is essential. In addition to e-mail for communication and a google drive for sharing and storing documents, the practice of video-conferencing was used for the synchronous online classes. In the early days of 2018 when the module was first devised, the use of video-conferencing platforms had been highly innovative, but by 2022, and the changes initiated

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by the Covid pandemic, the use of Zoom (and similar platforms) had become a normalized part of academic life.

For international classrooms, it is commonalities across nationalities and educational and peer experiences that are the building blocks for a new small culture (Holliday, 1999, p. 249). Staff and students collaborating on Global Classroom brought similarities in knowledge with regard to institutional, academic, and digital practices. It was noticeable, for example, that directly from the first class where a guest speaker addressed the group on the topic of the environment, all of the students took to using the Zoom chat function in order to ask questions, thus demonstrating their joint familiarity with this practice in digital (learning) cultures.

3. Postdigitality

Let us now consider the concept of postdigitality that raises central issues for an online module today. In its colloquial use, digital refers to computational electronic devices. Rather than "post" signalling an 'afterwards' or a completely new period, postdigitality signifies rather a fundamental continuation in the same manner as terms such as postcoloniality (Cramer, 2015, p. 15), but with differences in experience and perspective. One feature of postdigitality is that our fascination with digital information systems has become historical, because digitality today has become a normalized part of everyday life where the online and offline are almost seamlessly intertwined. Certainly, in the Global Classroom module, this was apparent in the phenomenon of the hybrid classroom which was experienced simultaneously as a 'normal' physical classroom with teacher and students face-to-face, and as an online experience where we communicated with students and staff overseas who appeared on the Zoom platform screen in the classroom.

Cramer (2015) points out how postdigitality involves hybrids of older and new media technologies where older technologies (e.g. newspapers, movies, television, radio) are remediated – that is embedded and repurposed via the Internet (p. 20). User creation is at the heart of these postdigital activities, giving the impression of assertion of agency, although we are always part of systems. Every week for the Global Classroom, small student groups, one from each university, made a presentation. The students usually used Canva as a tool that facilitates online collaborative work. For the end of semester project, student groups (one per university) were required to produce a video based on

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individual students' self-filming (via smartphone), that linked the theme of being an active global citizen to one of the weekly topics they chose to review. Embedded in the digital presentations and videos were traces of older media technologies: graphic design, texts, photographs, drawings, mathematical graphs, extracts from television programmes and films, music tracks. What is interesting to note is that all of the students had already acquired the technical and artistic skills to make these products, demonstrating how digital design is now a competence firmly established in educational (and extra-educational) environments internationally. Postdigitality has both transformed the experience of learning through opening up new possibilities of virtual relations and activities and had an impact on formal educational procedures: As evidenced in this module, the old traditional form of assessment through individual written assignments has been replaced by collaborative digital audio-visual productions.

Another important feature of the postdigital era is adopting a more reflective critical stance than previously with regard to the digital. Focussing on education, Knox (2019) takes a critical approach along three lines: He points out how digital technologies rely on hidden exploitation of labour and natural resources, how the influence of digital technology is increasing the mechanical metrification of institutional quality, and how the economic rationales that underpin digital technology, as seen in corporate platform models and the data-driven technology industry, are encroaching on teaching and learning. Global Classroom is reliant on using the Zoom video-conferencing platform. While the module could not operate without such a tool that allows efficient interpersonal and international connection and communication, use of the platform incorporates the module into the model of subjectivity and identity linked to the profit-seeking data-driven economy of 'shareveillance'. This is largely hidden since no privacy messages appear upon opening the platform. Nevertheless, the Zoom privacy statement (Zoom, 2023) reveals that cookies on Zoom share data with third party partners for the purposes of advertising, marketing and analytics. For Knox (2019), the postdigital era must acknowledge assumptions associated with digital technologies, and ideally build public collective ideals into digital systems.

The critical focus of postdigitality may be used to analyze the Global Classroom module in further ways. Hall (2019) argues that the Internet can be conducive to democracy, as it allows decentred and non-hierarchical communications where a networked public connects to wider public spheres vertically (through timespace) and horizontally (by reaching different publics) (pp. 412–413). It is true that the Global Classroom module allows students and

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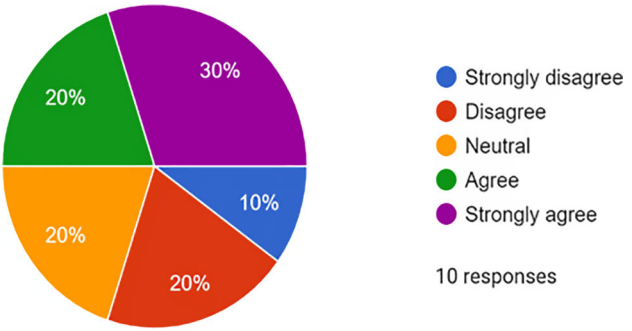
staff to interact with their counterparts in other countries whom they normally would not have met. However, as is well-known, the Internet also harbours what one might call anti-democratic tendencies: It fosters homophily in the form of virtual communities that are socio-spatial enclaves (our restricted group of staff and fourth-year university students), and, as mentioned above, it is subject to a state-corporate surveillance apparatus that extracts and commodifies data (Hall, 2019, pp. 408, 412). Furthermore, information that appears on the Internet may be propagated beyond the original intended recipients. As such, the democratic value and practice of freedom of speech may be hampered where Internet users are concerned about confidentiality of the content they produce. In the questionnaire undertaken with the Le Mans students, I provided a series of statements to which the students had to react in terms of level of agreement. The following statement concerned freedom and openness of speech:

Fig. 1: "I am careful about what I say in the digital classroom, since recordings of the class may potentially be seen by people outside the class participants."



The results are quite diffuse, showing a lack of uniformity of response among the students. Nevertheless, 50 % of the students agree with the statement that they are careful about what they say in the digital classroom. In addition to the matter of cookies, the Zoom privacy policy reveals that content (such as recorded class sessions) may be provided by Zoom to judicial or regulatory authorities when requested (Zoom, 2023). It is the porousness of the Internet environment that arouses the students' distrust, and therefore their

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self-surveillance of expression. Of course, in face-to-face communication, we also survey what we say, but a digital environment that involves uploaded recordings of sessions increases this phenomenon. Where students (and staff) are possibly not voicing their opinions openly and honestly, this is problematic for a university module whose aim is to foster open communication across national boundaries.

Another area of critical reflection that relates to democratic potential and that is relevant for the Global Classroom module is the issue of the digital divide. Although across the world access to the Internet has greatly improved, there are still disparities. With regard to the three countries whose universities collaborated in the Global Classroom module, according to Datareportal in early 2022, the Internet penetration rates were: France 93 %, Brazil 77 %, and South Africa 68.2 %. One factor related to Internet penetration is age: Older people may not have adapted to this technology. But what explains the difference between the three countries is the level of poverty.

During the course of the module, we became directly aware of the difficulty of living conditions in South Africa: We often saw our colleagues and the students in South Africa plunged into darkness, as they were subjected to load-shedding, rolling electricity cuts due to rationing of the electricity supply that does not meet demand. Of course, the Global Classroom participants represented a privileged sector of their country's population, as university students and staff generally do. In the case of FAAP (Brazil), this is a private university, so the issue of an elite is compounded even further. In their presentations, Brazilian and South African students mentioned the issue of poverty but tended to do so in a distant and statistical way. No images or videos were shown, for example. This gave the impression of masking inequality and, together with the elite nature of the bubble of tertiary students, meant that this Internet-based module was somewhat lacking in horizontal connections reaching out to certain publics (Hall, 2019, p. 413).

4. Virtual Exchange

However, discussion surrounding the concept/practice of virtual exchange provides a different perspective and even a partial counterargument to the charge of elite staus made above. Previously, to the turn of the century, internationalization of higher education study programmes was associated with student and staff mobility, that is, physically moving to a different country,

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which was limited to those who had the financial means for such travel. Contemporary information and communication technologies allow internationalization at home to occur, that is, the provision of opportunities through virtual exchange for international and intercultural contacts, connections, and learning for all students, not just the mobile elite (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). With regard to the French students on the Global Classroom module, for example, a number come from modest socio-economic milieux, for which study abroad in distant countries in the traditional physical sense could not be afforded. Thus, although actually travelling to a country provides a very enriching experience, the international virtual classroom has the advantage of widening participation.

Virtual exchange can be defined as "an experiential approach that harnesses technology to engage students in online international exchanges in order to foster the development of global and intercultural competences or citizenship" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). Other terms have been used for this teaching format such as globally networked learning, collaborative online international learning (COIL), telecollaboration, and online intercultural exchange. The curriculum of a virtual exchange module may be prepared, and the module organized administratively by an organization such as Erasmus or the Sharing Perspectives Foundation, or it may be co-designed when two or more educators from different national contexts collaboratively design and implement an exchange. The Global Classroom module follows the latter model. In principle, virtual exchange espouses a social constructivist view of education whereby it is considered that all knowledge develops as a result of social interaction and language use and is therefore a shared experience. A constructivist learning approach attaches as much importance to the process of learning as it does to the acquisition of knowledge. In parallel, the aim of virtual exchange is not only acquiring subject-specific knowledge, but also acquiring intercultural skills in terms of relating to people of different backgrounds (Helm & Guth, 2022).

The first element of the definition of virtual exchange is an "online international exchange" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). For Global Classroom, the digital environment allowed collaboration across different universities in different countries that the students were unfamiliar with, creating a new experience of intersubjectivity through these connections. Virtual international study experiences can indeed cover a wider geographic scope than physical student mobility programmes that are restricted to a particular region (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 272), such as Europe (Erasmus). The Global Classroom module was

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an exceptional experience in terms of the students' programmes. One could even liken it to the concept of life-wide learning: learning which takes place in a variety of spaces that are not necessarily organized or formal (Aoki, 2020, p. 42). The space created by the module is formal, but it extends learning spaces beyond what is usual for the students through its inter-continental character. The diverse international nature of the module was highly appreciated by the students, as revealed in the questionnaire. Here are some of the students' responses when asked what they appreciated about the module: "I like the fact that every week we are discussing a common subject while being from different countries," "Learning about other countries and their cultures, especially from other continents," "Having the point of view of people from other countries" (student survey). Another aspect of extension beyond the students' normal academic experience was working with students from different disciplines, namely political science and cultural studies. Generally, university students are confined to their particular disciplines that can be seen as separate small cultures (Holliday, 1999), so the module offered the perhaps challenging but interesting possibility of interaction with students specializing in different disciplines. As Henwood and Thuynsma (2019) note in their report about the module (p. 11): "Weekly discussions and student-led presentations display different disciplinary, political and socio-cultural slants […] We embrace this as essential for the aim of self-development."

The second element of the definition of virtual exchange provided by Helm and Guth is fostering "the development of global and intercultural competences" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). An important question regarding Global Classroom is whether acquiring "global and intercultural competences" is part of the objectives of the module. In the aims for the module, Henwood & Thuynsma (2019) list (pp. 9, 14): "to increase international communication and understanding of political structures and sentiments prominent in the 21st century," "to promote cross-cultural understanding (students were surprised at the different perspectives that are possible in examining topical issues)," and "to foster openness to new knowledge and respect for diverse opinions." These goals place emphasis on understanding other systems and cultures, in other words acquiring knowledge. A key element of virtual exchange is indeed that it has the potential to offer students access to a rich "ecology of knowledges" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 275). In my observation of the Global Classroom module, there was definitely an emphasis on acquiring knowledge that embraced similarity and diversity both across and within national units. The knowledge emphasis was enacted through the format of the weekly classes

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which, as noted above, consisted primarily of a guest speaker from one country, questions to the speaker from the audience, and powerpoint presentations by small groups of students from the different countries on the weekly topic as applied to their country/continent. In this format, there was participation by students who were exposed to/acquired knowledge, but little student-to-student interaction.

It is useful to discuss here the concepts of cross-culturality; "cross-cultural understanding" figures as a goal in Henwood & Thuynsma's (2019, p. 9) list for the Global Classroom module and interculturality; acquiring "intercultural competences" is a goal for virtual exchange modules (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). For some, the meaning of the two terms is interchangeable, but for our purposes a distinction is useful. Cross-culturality can be conceived as being comparison-based, focusing on conceptual knowledge (Fries, n.d.). It is a matter, for example, of making comparisons between different cultural or political systems in different countries. This certainly occurred in the Global Classroom module. A notable occasion was the discussion of national election systems where we discovered that in Brazil voting is compulsory but not in South Africa and France, and furthermore that voting ages are different: The minimum age is 18 in South Africa and France, whereas in Brazil young people can vote at 16. Such comparisons gave rise to interesting reflections and debates that would not have taken place if students had been restricted to their own system. So, exposure to new knowledge occurred, comparisons sometimes sparked reflection, and concomitantly, it is presumed that openness to diverse ways of thinking and being, and respect for differences in cultural systems and for different points of view were fostered.

In contrast to cross-culturality, interculturality can be defined as involving interpersonal or small group interaction. For Zhu (2013), interculturality occurs when in the course of an interpersonal or small group interaction, elements of cultural similarity or difference among the interactants become salient, in other words, these differences/similarities become an explicit matter of verbal or non-verbal communication. What then is the relationship between interculturality and "global and intercultural competences" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265)? In Mike Byram's well-known model of intercultural (communicative) competence, knowledge is one component. Other competences are skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, attitudes such as curiosity and openness, and skills of critical evaluation. For Byram (Hoff, 2020), "these interlinked competences may not only help the intercultural speaker to achieve effective exchange of information, but also to

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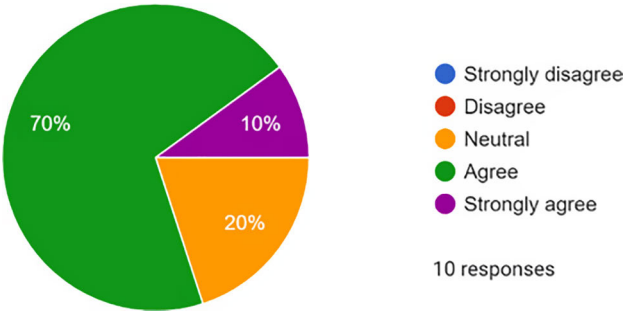
establish and maintain interpersonal relationships based on mutual respect and understanding" (p. 57). Achievements in terms of interpersonal relationships are thus a key outcome of intercultural (communicative) competence. In order to develop the latter, there must be opportunities for interpersonal or small group communication with cultural others. In the case of Global Classroom, there was only one occasion when students were separated into break-out groups on Zoom to allow small group interaction, and otherwise there were no opportunities for interpersonal interaction across the students from the three universities. Here are the results with regard to two relevant questions from the survey (students were asked if they agreed with the statements):

Fig. 2: "As a result of doing the Global Classroom module, I learnt something about South Africa and Brazil."



Concerning knowledge acquisition regarding different countries as a result of undertaking the module, 80 % of the students responded affirmatively and no students disagreed. In contrast, with regard to obtaining experience and skills of interaction with people from different countries during the module, 40 % of the students disagreed and 50 % agreed. These results confirm from the student experience point of view that the focus of the module was on cross-cultural comparison and knowledge acquisition, rather than on the development of intercultural interpersonal competence through experiences of interculturality, interpersonal or small group interactions where cultural issues become salient. The module catered for the acquisition of knowledge and the fostering openness that are included in definitions of intercultural competence, but it did not fully correspond with the aim of virtual exchange for students to

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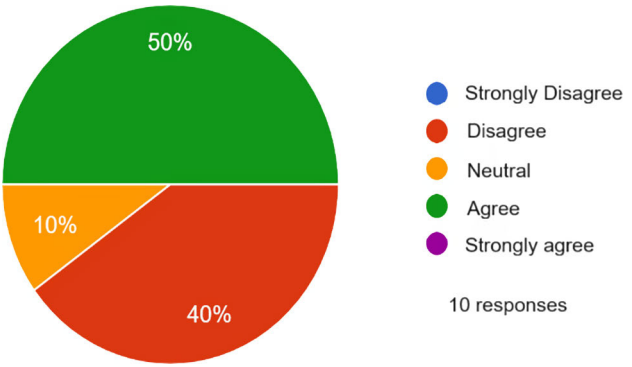
develop a range of intercultural skills in dealing with cultural others. Of course, if the teaching aim is to enhance intercultural competence, it is not sufficient simply to bring students from different countries together in small group arrangements. Care needs to be placed into the design of targeted pedagogical activities. As O'Dowd writes: "To develop skills in communicating and collaborating with people from different cultures, it is necessary to provide students with interculturally challenging tasks which require high levels of negotiation and collaboration" (O'Dowd, 2021, p. 218).

Fig. 3: "As a result of doing this module, I gained experience/developed skills in interacting with people from different countries."



5. Postdigital Critical Cosmopolitanism

Continuing on with the issue of outcomes of the module, our final concept/practice remains postdigital critical cosmopolitanism. The term cosmopolitanism generally signifies cultural links and empathic feelings of solidarity beyond the national level (Lenehan, 2022, p. 16). The Global Classroom module fostered links beyond the national units where the three universities are based, and as discussed above, these links led to the gaining of knowledge of cultural others. Feelings of solidarity cannot come into existence without knowledge of the lives of others. During the module, some student questions indeed revealed empathy for those in other countries, notably following the talk where we learnt about state capture in Africa by business

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interests and warlords which has reinforced suffering of the populations. Critical cosmopolitanism is a more specific term/concept coined by sociologist Gerard Delanty that places emphasis on a particular process, namely self-transformation through coming into contact with the other:

> Transnational movements, cultural diversity and hybrid cultures do not in themselves constitute cosmopolitanism, […] More important is the critical moment in which changes in self-understanding occur as a result of global challenges. […] A cosmopolitan perspective does not simply involve accepting the views of the Other but requires a problematization of one's own assumptions, as well as those of the Other. (Delanty, 2009, p. 16)

Lenehan extends the notion of critical cosmopolitanism to the digital. There are clearly downsides to the contemporary Internet that is in thrall to global North-dominated algorithmic capitalism, and is ethically neutral such that it can foster global solidarities of racism and extremism. At the same time, post-digitality provides a world-wide contact zone brimming with benign possibilities for intercultural encounters, discussions on matters of local and global concern, and thus changes in self-understanding. The Internet is viewed as a space for potential dialogical processes leading to self-reflection and transformations that may be individual or collective (Lenehan, 2022, pp. 22–25). The term transformation could apply to learning new information, enriching one's knowledge. However, Delanty's (2009) thinking goes beyond this. It is not simply a matter of amassing new knowledge, but of putting one's existing belief systems into question. Here, the notion of transculturality is useful to illuminate Delanty's ideas. As mentioned before, cross-culturality can be defined as the cognitive comparison of cultural systems, and interculturality involves cultural similarities/differences becoming salient in the course of interpersonal interaction. These types of processes are necessary for but do not necessarily give rise to self-reflection and change, whereas transculturality describes processes of change subsequent to encounter. It signifies permeation, negotiation, interconnectedness, fusions and mixes, ongoing transforming dialogues, moments of self-estrangement of one's cultural assumptions, plural affiliations and fluidity (Dagnino, 2012). Thus, creation of newness and transforming of thinking.

In the survey, students were asked if Global Classroom had led to a change in their thinking on particular issues. Here is how they responded:

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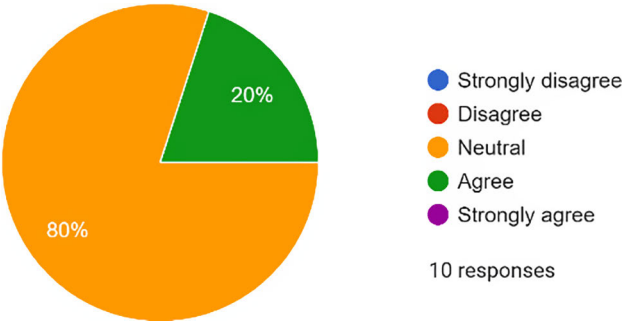
Fig. 4: "As a result of doing this module, I changed/developed my thinking on some issues covered during the classes."



In terms of (postdigital) critical cosmopolitanism, the key occurrence for the individual must be self-transformation. Here 20 % of the students reported a change or development in thinking on topics covered during the module, whereas 80 % provided a neutral response to this question. Clearly the unit did not achieve critical cosmopolitan aims. However, just as we noted before how targeted task design is essential in promoting the goal of acquisition of intercultural competence (O'Dowd, 2021, p. 218), so too may the pedagogical choice of topics of discussion be crucial with respect to critical cosmopolitan goals. Particular topics that juxtapose highly contrasting views across the participants may challenge their thinking. Each year that the Global Classroom module is offered, weekly topics differ. In earlier iterations of the module, the topic of identity was covered. Henwood and Thuynsma (2019, p. 9)) report the following:

In the discussion on identity, some students' perspectives changed. French students moved from an assumed non-racial approach to embrace individual racial identities as a sign of respect for different cultural heritages rather than seeing a derogatory connotation associated with a race label.

In France, the republican ideology taught since childhood in the national education system is that the primary identity for all is that of being a French citizen. Since everyone is deemed equal before the law as French citizens, it is considered inappropriate to consider or mention skin colour or ethnic/national origin, and a kind of colour-blindness is promoted. If the French republican ideology inculcated in the French students was challenged by the Global Classroom module, as indicated in the above quote, this was indeed an achievement.

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6. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the Global Classroom module through the prism of several concepts/practices that have proved enlightening for the analysis. Global Classroom operates as a small culture. A framework for the module was set up by the group of cross-university teachers from the start in terms of the basic content and teaching format. But what emerged during the course of the module in a more spontaneous way was specific content, practices and behaviours of participants. It was noticeable that participants brought with them prior knowledge of educational and digital practices that were then embedded in the fabric of this new international small learning culture. The Global Classroom module corresponds perfectly with the concept of postdigitality whereby the entanglement of the online and offline has become a normal part of life. For some sessions, students from France were in the classroom, and for others they connected online from home; I would thus speak with students as if interchangeably in-person or online. Such technology of course does have downsides, and the concept of postdigitality also includes a reflective critical attitude towards the digital. One issue is the difficulty of keeping digital communication confidential. Awareness of this was embodied in some of the students' reluctance to "tell all." The implications for free speech and democracy are worrying. Another negative aspect is the digital divide. My impression of presentations from South African and Brazilian students was that the poverty of sectors of their countries whose population has no access to luxuries such as the Internet was a subject that was mentioned abstractly and, thus, downplayed.

The concept/practice of virtual exchange was found to correspond partially to the Global Classroom module. Certainly, Global Classroom allowed staff and student groups from three different countries and continents to collaborate in an international exchange via means of electronic communication, in particular a video-conferencing platform. The module allowed students to discover information and opinions from their counterparts in the other countries, and comparison of different national systems led to some interesting discussion. Enrichment of knowledge was achieved, and through the students' exposure to different perspectives, it is possible that openness towards cultural others was fostered. Such openness is typically considered to be a feature of intercultural competence. However, the aim of virtual exchange units to enhance intercultural skills in interacting with cultural others was not fully taken on board by Global Classroom, because developing such skills normally requires opportu-

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nities for interpersonal or small group interaction. In the iteration of Global Classroom observed, these opportunities were lacking.

A greater amount of student-to-student interaction across the three universities could also have fostered the students' sense of forming a unified group of global citizens, a sense of cosmopolitanism enabled through postdigitality. The key feature of (postdigital) critical cosmopolitanism is that through contact with the other, one challenges one's own thinking as well as that of the other, with the result that some self-transformation occurs. For Global Classroom, it was found that transformation did not seem to take place to a significant extent, but that this may depend on the topics studied. Thus, whether it is a matter of fostering the development of intercultural skills through specific targeted activities, or choosing particular topics for discussion and study that might lead to transformation in thinking, some careful activity planning by the pedagogical team is essential.

To conclude, we will consider what might be ways forward in planning further iterations of this module. The module involves a teaching team that incorporates cultural and disciplinary diversity: Staff some from the South African, Brazilian, and French educational systems. Several staff are from the academic discipline of political science, with one teacher from history, and one from languages and communication. This diversity is enriching but may also necessitates more time in reaching consensus on the module's on-going goals. One topic for discussion concerns representativity and power differentials: To what extent has coverage of issues been representative of all socio-economic sectors of each country? Because we, staff and students, tend to originate from an elite sector of society, does this prevent us from providing a broad view?

There are also questions to be discussed concerning trans/inter/cross-culturality. Transculturality (transformations in thinking subsequent to contact with a cultural other) may not be appropriate as an explicit module goal. However, a question that needs to be asked is: Should cross-culturality (knowledge sharing and comparison) continue to be privileged, or could there also be room for interculturality (interpersonal interaction and negotiation) such that developing intercultural interpersonal skills could be added to the explicit goals for the module?

With regard to student recommendations from the survey for future iterations of the module, the French students made two main requests. Firstly, they supported the idea of greater disciplinary integration, specifically the inclusion of more cultural studies-oriented topics in relation to politics. Secondly, they were strongly in favour of more student interaction in the form of small

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group student-to-student discussions, and some students also supported the idea of a small group cross-university assessment. Given that students would like more opportunities for interpersonal interaction, there is support from the student body surveyed for the practical conditions necessary for interculturality which targeted pedagogical activities can enhance in order to develop intercultural skills. Since the practices of a small culture are always dynamic and shift in accordance with changing circumstances (Holliday, 1999, p. 248), it is to be expected that Global Classroom will evolve in its aims and content.

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Virtual Exchange as a Mechanism for Digital Education

Rawan Tahboub

Abstract *Virtual exchange (VE), a pedagogical approach towards intercultural dialogue among young people supported by technology, has been prominent over the past two to three decades. In this chapter, I offer a general introduction to the different types of Virtual Exchange and focus on a particular approach provided by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation (SPF). The logic and theoretical foundation on which the SPF programmes and courses are built are presented and the efficacy of using Virtual Exchange as a tool to prepare the ground for the seeds of social inclusion and civic engagement are debated, while various virtual exchange programmes offered by the SPF and its partners are also discussed. This chapter combines scientific research with years of practice to offer a holistic view of the application of Virtual Exchange in peace education. I dwell on my own ten years of experience in the field of VE, wearing the various hats of participant, facilitator, coach and mentor, trainer, programme officer and partnership coordinator at the Sharing Perspectives Foundation (SPF), as well as a lecturer at Hebron University in Palestine.*

Keywords *Virtual Exchange; Facilitative Learning; Online Education; Social Reconciliation; Dialogue*

1. Introduction

The words digital, virtual, and hybrid are not new terminologies; however, they have become very well-known with a significant shift to online and/or hybrid learning models, pre- and post-pandemic. For example, for the past two decades, Virtual Exchange (VE) has been a prominent tool that has brought people from geographically distant places to discuss, debate, and exchange

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perspectives, while also sharing expertise, experience, and knowledge, as well as beliefs, ideas, and customs. This may lead to mutual understanding, appreciation, and the acquisition of knowledge regarding various cultures.

A year into the pandemic, screen fatigue was a common syndrome of online education, and educators and institutions desperately needed new strategies to engage students while offering intercultural communication opportunities. The influx of high demand for VE and tailored courses and workshops on online teaching flushed the web; luckily, organizations who had already been developing the field of VE, such as SPF, Soliya, UniCollaboration and others, were able to assist lecturers and institutions with pedagogically tested approaches. It is worth mentioning here that these three organizations (SPF, Soliya, and UniCollaboration) retain different programming when offering their Virtual Exchanges, however, they share the same pedagogical approaches and strategies and collaborate in trainings and workshops.

Although there has been quite a substantial momentum in building and offering Virtual Exchanges, scientific research has not given it its due right; most of the publications in this arena are case studies of specific exchanges, conference proceedings, or project reports. Therefore, in this chapter I combine my experiences with scientific approaches to help the reader visualize VE as a concept, an approach, and a practice.

2. What is Virtual Exchange?

Like any terminology, there are debates and controversies on what exactly VE is, and which models are included and which are not. Thus to convey a better understanding of the concept in use, I build on the definition of the project EVOLVE (n.d.)[1]:

> Virtual Exchange (VE) is a practice, supported by research, that consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programs or activities in which constructive communication and interaction take place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated

1 The Erasmus + EVOLVE (Evidence-Validated Online Learning through Virtual Exchange) project, launched in January 2018 and led by the University of Groningen, aims to mainstream virtual exchange as an innovative form of collaborative international learning across disciplines in higher education institutions in Europe and beyond.

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> and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators. Virtual Exchange combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology.
>
> […] VE is:
>
> - *Sustained*: Unfolding over time with regular, intensive interaction.
> - *Technology-enabled*: Using new media, digital, and/or mobile technologies.
> - Preferably based on *regular synchronous or near-synchronous* meetings using high social presence media.
> - *People-to-people*: Involving inclusive, intercultural collaboration and dialogue that bridges differences and distances and inspires action with a long-term positive impact on relationships.
> - *Learner-led*: Following the philosophy of dialogue where participants are the main recipients and the main drivers of knowledge; learning through dialogue means that participants will seek mutual understanding and co-create knowledge based on their own experiences.
> - *Facilitated*: with the support of trained facilitators and/or educators.
> - *Educational*: Integrated into formal and/or non-formal educational programmes and activities to develop measurable increases in the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that foster pro-social behaviours.
> - *Structured to foster mutual understanding*: Covering topics related to identity, empathy, perspective-taking, critical reflection, intercultural understanding, and helping participants to engage in constructive conversations in the face of ontological and epistemological differences; a key tenet of VE is that intercultural understanding and awareness are not automatic outcomes of contact between different groups/cultures.

In many aspects, Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs), as one form of VE, differentiates itself from other forms of online education like MOOCs, virtual mobility, and blended mobility to name a few. According to Mühlbauer and van der Velden (2022, p. 8), those four are comparable in terms of sustained interaction and are defined as follows:

IOOCs "combine content presented in a similar format to MOOCs, with an interactive component which includes weekly synchronous discussion sessions in small groups with the support of a dialogue facilitator, to encourage people-to-people intercultural communication." (Mühlbauer & van der Velden, 2022, p. 8) While Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) are "courses usually

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delivered online through a platform such as EdX, Coursera or Futurelearn [...] the focus of these is primarily on content delivery – they are mostly based on recorded video lectures and learning materials. Although many now do have a forum component and encourage students to interact, the interaction is not sustained and is optional." (Mühlbauer & van der Velden, 2022, p. 8)

However, Virtual Mobility allows "students from one educational institution to follow courses organized at a different institution (usually based in a different country) without having to leave home." (Mühlbauer & van der Velden, 2022, p. 8) The primary aim of Virtual Mobility is to impart subject knowledge, potentially in a field or on a specific topic not covered at the student's home university. This is achieved by leveraging complementary expertise but without necessitating student interaction with peers from the host institution.

Lastly, Blended Mobility is "the combination of physical mobility with a virtual component, aimed at facilitating collaborative online learning and teamwork." (Mühlbauer & van der Velden, 2022, p. 8). The virtual element can serve multiple purposes: It can prepare students for physical mobility, or it can be utilized post-physical mobility to further enrich cultural learning. Alternatively, it can be integrated during physical mobility itself to directly enhance certain aspects of the experience (Mühlbauer & van der Velden, 2022, p. 8).

3. Why Choose Virtual Exchange?

As already mentioned, the present author has worn and exchanged various hats of participant, facilitator, coach and mentor, trainer, program officer, partnership coordinator, and lecturer within the world of Virtual Exchange. I started my journey in 2013 as a participant in the first program offered by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation – "Perspectives on the Euro(pean) Crisis" – while undertaking my MA degree at Osnabrück University, in Germany. The following year I underwent intensive advanced online facilitation training and began as an online facilitator, becoming then an experienced facilitator, mentor and coach by 2017. From 2018, I led the development of the first Arabic Virtual Exchange "Technology and Society", and managed programmes and partnerships while facilitating groups in various Virtual Exchanges. Those manifold experiences provided me with transversal, pedagogical, and conflict transformation skills. Likewise, exploring with partners the possibilities of

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the integration, accreditation, and institutionalization of Virtual Exchange heightened many benefits for the lecturers, their students and institutions, and Hebron University (Palestine), the institution at which I teach.[2]

As a lecturer, I used Virtual Exchange as a complementary component to enrich my students' experiences on topics they would not otherwise have tackled and offered them opportunities to meet with young people from other cultures and geographically distant places. Knowing that Palestinians suffer severely from movement restrictions, even the chance to meet other Palestinian students from the West Bank and Gaza was a new experience for them.[3] I also used my personal experiences with my students to engage many universities and coordinators to join us and offer virtual exchange courses to their students. Mine is not the only success story for the integration of VE into the academic curriculum. Other success stories of implementation partners can be found in the EVE reports[4] and the *Journal of Virtual Exchange*[5].

The question that comes to mind is: Why chose virtual exchange, not other forms of blended learning? As Helm and van der Velden (2019, p. 139) write:

> Virtual Exchange is a potentially more inclusive medium for connecting a greater number and diversity of youth to a space for dialogue and relationship-building with their global peers. Through facilitated, meaningful, and multilateral interaction, young people have the opportunity to build greater understanding of the relationship between different societies, expand their worldview and build critical 21st century skills and attitudes such as communication skills, self and global-awareness, critical and analytical thinking, curiosity, and media and digital literacy, which are also important for employability.

VE strives for intercultural awareness and sensitivity through opportunities to explore assumptions, beliefs, values, feelings, attitudes, behaviours, and self-

2 For more information see the Toolkit for Integrating Virtual Exchange in Higher Education, see: https://frames-project.eu/outputs/toolkit/

3 In my courses at Hebron University, my students mainly took part in the Technology and Society and Cultural Encounters Virtual Exchanges, where they met with participants from other universities in Palestine, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, Algeria, and EU countries, mainly Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands, as well as Venezuela in Latin America.

4 https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/eyp_eve/files/ec-01-21-404-en-n_final.pdf

5 https://journal.unicollaboration.org

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reflection in a safe space and constructively engage with differences. Likewise, it assures the facilitation of a group process built on inter-group, dialogue, and conflict resolution theories while empowering the development of 21st-century communication skills that emphasize active listening, empathy, and understanding. Similarly, VE tackles digital literacy by introducing ways technology could be used to build a more sustainable and inclusive world. Finally, VE works on deepening and widening perspectives on life situations, exemplified by the testimonials of numerous alumni from various programmes.[6] One example is from a participant who joined the Cultural Encounters course offered by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation in 2018. She reflects:

> [W]e learned to put oneself in somebody's position which is a skill that will be helpful far beyond this [virtual exchange] course. Even in the case of disagreement, we acquired a degree of empathy because of which we were able to try to understand the reasons for someone's divergent opinion instead of judging this person because of his or her view. This is a very essential ability in order to talk with each other as equals and being open-minded in regard of other understandings and beliefs.[7]

4. Which Model of Virtual Exchange?

There are various emerging models within the intricate realm of Virtual Exchange ranging from, but not limited to, Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs), Online Facilitated Dialogue (OFD), Transnational Exchange Projects (TEPs), and Advocacy Training (AT).[8] These four models remained the principal VE activities for the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project (EVE)[9] which ran from 2018 to 2020. Each component was led by a different partner in the consortium headed by Search for Common Ground (Belgium)[10]. iOOCs were

6 https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/impact/

7 https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/impact/

8 For more information on those different formats, see Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Impact Report 2020 https://youth.europa.eu/d8/sites/default/files/eyp_eve/files/ec-01-21-404-en-n_final.pdf

9 Erasmus + Virtual Exchange (EVE) 2018–2020 is a pilot project part of the Erasmus+ programme funded by the European Commission. For further information on the programme and the project, see: https://youth.europa.eu/erasmusvirtual/

10 https://www.sfcg.org

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led by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation (Netherlands), OFDs by Soliya (USA and Tunisia), TEPs by UniCollaboration (Italy), and AT by the Anne Lindh Foundation (Germany).

The fundamental principle of all models lies with the use of technology to facilitate connections among young people across geographical and cultural boundaries; however, there also exist notable differences between these models. Broadly speaking, two typologies can be discerned within EVE (Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange): 'ready-made' exchanges, which are developed and implemented by project consortium members, and 'grassroots' exchanges, organized by educators or youth workers who have undergone specialized training programmes. Additionally, further differentiations may be made based on content, participant activities, duration (measured in weeks), and the intensity of engagement in various activities. These distinctions provide invaluable insights into the level of participant involvement in Virtual Exchange endeavours.

Table (1) compares between the four types of Virtual Exchange in terms of the above-mentioned criteria:

Table 1: Models of Virtual Exchange Activities Based on the Table of Helm and van der Velden (2021)

	Online Facilitated Dialogue (OFD)	Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs)	Transnational Exchange Project (TEP)	Advocacy Training/ Debate (AT)
Lead institution or partnership type programme	Soliya	Sharing Perspectives Foundation	HEI or youth organization partnerships with support from UNICollaboration	Debate leaders with support from Anne Lindh Foundation
Programme Administration Type	4 VE programmes run the same way across multiple sites	3 to 5VE programmes run the same way across multiple sites	Unique co-designed VEs	Single VE programme run in different ways by local team leaders

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	Online Facilitated Dialogue (OFD)	Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs)	Transnational Exchange Project (TEP)	Advocacy Training/ Debate (AT)
Learning Content or Topics	Empathy, global competence	Empathy, global competence, iOOC specific content	Intercultural communication, collaboration, subject-specific content	Debating skills, topics related to debating
VE Activity type	Dialogue (sometimes also project)	Dialogue, videolectures, interactive assignments	Asynchronous tasks, project-based activities, dialogue	Debate, post-debate dialogue session
Duration	2 hrs meeting a week for 2, 4, 5 or 8 weeks	2 hrs meeting a week for 5,6, 9, or 10 weeks	2–4 hours live meeting dialogue and 10–30 hrs asynchronous work over 4 to 8 weeks	3 hrs debate and 2 hrs dialogue trainings over 1 or 2 weeks
Quality control	Mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, coach/ observation	Mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, coach/ observation	Mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, mentors	Mini-web surveys, post-exchange evaluation, adjudicators

Each model has its specificities, and each model may have multiple formats. In this chapter, I only focus on iOOCs offered by the Sharing Perspectives

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Foundation (SPF)[11] as the format I am most acquainted with and also the form of VE implemented in the project in Palestine, which I focus on.

SPF developed its model of educational exchange on facilitative learning[12] to encourage deep exploration of topics related to identity, empathy, perspective-taking, critical reflection, and intercultural understanding. It also aims at equipping participants with 21st century skills relating to employability and transversal skills, tolerance of ambiguity, curiosity, confidence, serenity, decisiveness, and vigour (Helm & van der Velden 2019, p. 24).[13] The iOOCs designed by the SPF are based on three core elements: multimedial material, facilitated dialogue, and interactive assignments (Millner, 2020, p. 157).

Multimedia Materials

On a weekly basis, participants are stimulated by bite-size (i.e. shorter) materials prepared by experts and further practitioners on the exchange topics. Those include short articles, infographics, videos, and podcasts on the week's theme. Participants read, watch, and/or listen to the weekly materials, reflect

11 Sharing Perspectives Foundation is a nonprofit organization based in the Netherlands. It offers contemporary online learning experiences, enabling people to interact constructively across differences and divides. Since its foundation in 2012, the Sharing Perspectives has engaged more than 10,000 young people in virtual exchange courses, worked with over 80 institutions, trained and coached 250+ facilitators, facilitated 1000s of online dialogue sessions, and implemented over 10 different virtual exchanges in English as well as Arabic. See: https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/about/.

12 See the following sub-section.

13 SPF bases its approach to developing transversal skills based on the following definitions: "**Tolerance of Ambiguity** (Acceptance of other people's culture and attitudes and adaptability): A range, from rejection to attraction, of reactions to stimuli perceived as unfamiliar, complex, dynamically uncertain or subject to multiple conflicting interpretations (McLain, 1993); **Curiosity** (Openness to new experiences): The orientation toward seeking novel and challenging objects, events and ideas with the aim of integrating these experiences and information; **Confidence** (Trust in own competence) A favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self (Rosenberg, 1965, p. 15); **Serenity** (Awareness of own strengths and weaknesses): Beliefs in one's capabilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to meet given situational demands (Wood & Bandura, 1989); **Decisiveness** (Ability to make decisions Decisiveness) Ability to reach decisions as quickly as possible (Kosic, 2004)." (van der Velden et al., 2016, pp.219-220)

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individually, and then meet for group reflection in the facilitated dialogue sessions.

Facilitated Dialogue

On a weekly basis, participants meet at the same time and place in the same group with the same facilitator for two hours of dialogue. Along with trust/relationship-building, work on identity, critical thinking, process-reflection, conflict resolution, forward-thinking, activation, and group work activities, participants discuss and share their knowledge, experience, thoughts, and culture with the help of experienced dialogue facilitators. During the facilitated dialogue sessions, participants also plan for activities and initiatives to engage their peers and communities. Similarly, they are motivated to take actions during the course, where an ideal example taken from the "Climate Movements" course would be the planting of a tree in the name of the group. In order to ensure best facilitation, the EVE consortium introduces the figure of the mentor, who is an expert facilitator who supports 'newbies', and the coach who observes the session and gives feedback to the facilitator(s). In debate contests the figure of the adjudicator (or judge) has been introduced, i.e. the person determining the outcome and ranking of debaters or debater-teams.

Interactive Assignments

Participants have interactive assignments throughout the process, including content and process reflections, initiative developments, and community engagement.

Reflection is an integral part of the learning process. Participants have two short self-reflection written assignments every week: one on the content before the session (preparation assignment), and one on the discussion after the session (reflection journal). Likewise, participants go through meta-discussions on the process, as well as content reflection through dialogue but also activities stimulating in-depth analysis, critical thinking, and problem solving.[14]

Another main assignment is the community engagement assignment. It has multiple formats differing from one course to the other. For example, the flagship courses "Cultural Encounters" and "Climate Movements" contain a video dialogue assignment, where each group agrees on a question to ask their

14 Such activities can be found here: https://www.sessionlab.com/library

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peers, teachers, and family members who are not taking part in the course. The peers they choose for the video dialogue will then respond to each other in an asynchronous dialogue. The videos are posted on a private platform for the course, and each group has a separate group account where they post their peers' contributions. The participants show the videos and responses of the other respondents and ask their peers to respond to one or more discussions. This constitutes the discussion threads for the asynchronous dialogue. Another example would be the final assignments for the courses "Countering Hate Speech" and "Youth, Peace and Security", where participants were asked to create their initiatives for the cause they are working on. They had the option to work either independently or collaboratively, with mutual support through suggestions and sharing of information being an integral part of the process.

5. Facilitative Learning

Since a distinctive feature of VE is the combination of synchronous/asynchronous elements, a better understanding of the synergetic interplay is needed. The asynchronous element constitutes the preparation and reflection journal, the interactive assignments, the email communications between the facilitator and the participants, and the course team and the participants. The synchronous element is mainly the facilitated dialogue sessions – arguably, where most of the learning happens.

Each step of the VE is important, and the facilitative learning approach plays a key role in the learning process. Facilitative learning refers to an instructional approach that emphasizes the role of a facilitator in promoting effective learning experiences. In this approach, participants are at the centre of the learning process and the leaders of it (Hardika et al., 2018, p. 187). Their experiences, knowledge, and thoughts are main resources for the learning process, where peer-learning especially in an international setting is an added value to the participants. In this setting, participants are encouraged to share the full leadership of their group, initiating the discussion, asking each other questions, reflecting respectfully on others' thoughts and experiences, actively listening and showing empathy.

Reaching this genuine stage of exchange requires fostering safe spaces for participants to open up and speak freely; hence an experienced facilitator/s are needed here (Conti et al., 2022, p. 201).

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6. The Role of the Facilitator

In this approach, the facilitator serves as a guide or mentor rather than a traditional teacher who solely imparts knowledge. The facilitator's role is to create a safe environment that supports and encourages the participants' active engagement and knowledge construction, ensuring understanding and ability to contribute to discussions (Baraldi, Joslyn & Farini, 2022a, pp. 6–9). In addition, they provide guidance and opportunities for participants to explore and discover information, develop critical thinking skills, and apply their knowledge in real-world contexts (Helm, 2018, p. 112). Facilitation is composed by an array of actions, such as questions, invitations to talk, minimal responses, reformulations of the participants' contributions (Farini & Scollan, 2022), summaries, and also emotional support which starts with the initial greetings and ends with leave-taking (Helm, 2018, p. 112).

As an experienced facilitator, mentor and coach, I have worked with and trained many different facilitation styles. All styles incorporate empathy as an underlying element and share the same core principles of neutrality – in terms of refraining from sharing their opinions – and impartiality – i.e. fairness towards all participants, giving them the same opportunities to share their opinions and to make sure their statements are understood, Facilitators of the EVE consortium organizations are highly trained to refrain from sharing their opinions and ensure equal participation of all group members. In order to do that, they practice active listening and further facilitation techniques to react properly to non-verbal communication of the participants and make sure that all statements are correctly understood by providing summaries in both written chat messages and spoken explanations, asking follow-up questions or rephrasing the ideas shared. Facilitators are also prepared for the challenging situations of conflict, politically sensitive situations, and disengaged groups. Through tailored activities for critical thinking, conflict resolution, and teambuilding, like but not limited to the Ice-Berg, The Rose-Bud-Thorn, Walk a Mile in My Shoes, and many others[15], meta-discussions, and individual checkups, facilitators help transform conflicts into positive experiences, challenging biases and stereotypes and creating a common ground for understanding the issues addressed. A significant challenge for facilitators is to read group dynamics and power imbalances and offer activities and reflections, posing thought-provoking questions to keep the discussion flowing and ensuring

15 For more information on activities, see: https://www.sessionlab.com/library

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understanding, active engagement, and genuine learning. Facilitators help participants lead their discussions and retain the task of deepening understanding and developing trust, honesty, and empathy as the course progresses (Millner, 2020, p. 158–9).

Facilitators of SPF are equipped with a group process framework that guides the group through different phases, ensuring participants become progressively more comfortable in articulating their perspectives (Millner, 2020, p. 158–9). SPF has designed its group process to encompass different stages, recognizing that not every group follows a linear development. Facilitators utilize this framework as a guiding tool to facilitate genuine exchanges from the first encounter to winding down, understanding that groups may need to adapt and sometimes skip stages as they naturally progress. In my personal experience as well as in the literature (see e.g. Conti 2021; and Baraldi et al. 2022b), the more the group members trust the group, feel heard and confident of opening up; sharing personal stories and discussing openly challenging topics, the more they advance towards genuine discussion. Similarly, in my personal experience, the more the group addresses differences and self-manages disruptive conflicts and discussions tending towards creative solutions, the more the group moves towards effective dialogue and community engagement.

Facilitators are an integral component of the process, therefore, and investment in training and coaching for them has become a priority for organizations working in the arena of VE, such as SPF, Soliya, UNICollaboration and others.

7. Virtual Exchange in Education

Over the years VE has been integrated by lecturers and universities in many formats to offer students a wide range of opportunities to network and learn through intercultural exchange, also as part of their internationalization strategies. The demand for VEs increased during the pandemic and more lecturers and institutions began exploring the various types of VE to integrate to their strategies and budgets.[16] The popularity of virtual networking fairs and

16 A list of some of the partnering universities can be found here: https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/partnerships/

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info-sessions on VE like the ones offered by UNIMED[17] and COIL[18] indicated both a need and an interest in virtual exchanges.

Since the focus of this chapter is on iOOCs, I will delve into the integration of iOOCs into educational programmes and summarize the experience undertaken with VE in the SPF Programm[19] and present some observed benefits of incorporating iOOCs into the curriculum.

Building on my experience in partnership management, iOOCs were offered either as a standalone course (rarely due to accreditation bureaucracies), and more frequently as a replacement of a language course (mostly English), as an extra-curricular activity, and/or as part of an ongoing course which does not necessarily link directly to the theme of the VE, however it relates to it in terms of learning objectives (e.g intercultural communication, building 21st-century skills). The choice of the delivery method considered the needs of the partners and of their students.

In the following I will draw on the experience acquired at the University of Bordeaux and at Hebron University.

In her 2020 chapter, "Erasmus Virtual Exchange: An Authentic Learning Experience", Alexandra Reynolds explores the transformative impact of the participation to the flagship course "Cultural Encounters" delivered by SPF of the University students in Bordeaux. Utilizing their reflection journals, she assessed the authenticity of their learning based on four key factors: emerging community membership, altered world views, English language learning, and pedagogical conditions. Reynolds observed a progression from initial shyness and hesitation to confident group participation in the journals. Likewise, participants' journal entries indicated a growing self-awareness and a shift in their worldviews (Reynolds, 2020, p.91).

In relation to the English language learning, Reynolds reflected on overall satisfaction concerning improved English language skills. She used a comparative approach between English classes offered at the university and the VE based on the number of participants, place of residence/origin, and format, where participants in the VE emphasized the benefits of being in a smaller group compared to general classes, speaking with non-French speakers as a

17 https://www.uni-med.net

18 https://coil.suny.edu

19 I refer to a SPF-project involving the University of Bordeaux University in France, the University of Limerick in Ireland, the University of Bethlehem as well as the Hebron University in Palestine and many other universities in the MENA and EU.

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motivation for speaking English only, as well as interdisciplinarity (Reynolds 2020, p.92-3). Finally, she measured authentic learning in VE in relation to the pedagogical conditions of "engaging in meaningful and transformative interaction using English as a lingua franca; topic-focused study on a theme which is relevant to students as global citizens; learner autonomy and responsibility; an emerging sense of belonging to an online E+VE [sic] community; and interacting in a third (neutral) place." (Reynolds, 2020, p.95) She concluded by indicating the authentic nature of learning using VE as a "positive, existential, and positioned learner experience (Reynolds, 2020, p.96)". As a result Bordeaux University continues to partner with SPF and offer VE courses for its students.

Wearing the hat of lecturer, I can relate my personal experience with students at Hebron University. I engaged my students in the "Technology and Society"[20] course delivered by SPF in which SPF involved mainly students of the MENA region: Algeria, Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Palestine. The course was in Arabic. The VE was counted as their final assignment for their course. During the VE, I regularly offered participants the possibility to share their reflections regarding their VE-experience with me and their peers. Positive feedback in the reflections related to the atmosphere, the opportunity to meet other Arab youth whom they would not otherwise have had the opportunity to meet, and the interactive aspect of the experience. Alongside this bright side of VE and its successful incorporation into the regular structures of the curricula, difficulties regarding access to the Internet remained a main frustration and constraint to full engagement in some cases.

Thereupon, and since VE in education has been gaining in popularity globally, efforts to support the integration of VE in existing formats and the accreditation of standalone courses were put in place by various other organizations. Examples include, but are not limited to, the project FRAMES[21], COIL, UNICollaboration[22], and the Stevens Initiative[23] projects.

20 https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/programme/technology-and-society/

21 https://frames-project.eu

22 https://www.unicollaboration.org

23 https://www.stevensinitiative.org

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8. Potential New Areas for the Use of Virtual Exchange

So far, most of the relevant research in facilitative learning and Virtual Exchange has tackled the essence of the connection between exchange and learning. Throughout my work in Virtual Exchange and education, I have come to the idea of exploring the efficacy of using VE for social reconciliation in reference to Palestinian civil society, in a case study using cycles of virtual exchanges as described below. This project is described here, as it will be implemented in cooperation with SPF.

9. Virtual Exchange in Peace Education – Reconciliation

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Education (UNESCO, 1945) has placed in its constitution the importance of peace education, by indicating that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed." Peace education is a "process of acquiring the values and knowledge and developing the attitudes, skills and behaviour to live in harmony with oneself, with others, and with the natural environment. It aims to reduce violence, support the transformation of conflicts, and advance the peace capabilities of individuals, groups, societies and institutions" (Jäger in Berghof Foundation, 2019, p. 49).

Peace education can be approached through dialogue, where dialogue is initiated to acquire a better judgement of the argument and to overcome differences on the political and societal levels and to transform conflicts (Breitmaier and Schram in Berghof Foundation, 2019, p. 47). Virtual exchange is built on the modalities of dialogue. In dialogue, one listens to the different side(s) to understand and find meaning. My experience confirms that dialogue reveals assumptions for re-evaluation and acknowledgment of biases, causes introspection on one's position and its origin, and may promote an open-minded attitude. Furthermore, successful dialogue is collaborative and leads towards a sense of community understanding, brings out areas of ambivalence, looks for shared meanings, re-examines and destabilizes long-held ideas, articulates areas of conflict and differences, builds and empowers relationships, and honours silence.

Virtual Exchange as an ICT tool aims at fostering empathy, acknowledging differences, accepting the 'other,' challenging stereotypes, and building relationships based on mutual respect (Millner, 2020, p. 157), all of which adhere to

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the reconciliation method for social change introduced by Bar-Tal and Bennink (2004), who discuss a list of principles entailing the transformation of conflict into new goals; the re-definition of the 'other', usually perceived as an adversary, in order to build peaceful relationships among people; the challenging of one's own biases and the stimulation of awareness of one's own position in power dynamics; and the transformation of the relationship between the conflicting groups towards acceptance and mutual respect (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004, pp. 20–38).

Therefore, utilizing Virtual Exchange in conflictual socio-political settings is believed to contribute to fruitful dialogues and finding common ground on the issues under discussion.

Social Reconciliation

> Reconciliation is about finding a way of dealing with the issues that divide in a creative and viable manner. It is the beginning of learning to live together, not the culmination of a process that occurs after all alienating obstacles are removed. It is about serious talk, in-depth listening and a willingness to enact a new way of living together in which we can productively work with the most stubborn problems, practices and behaviours of the past (du Toit, 2003, p. 26).

"Toenadering," or coming together, is a core element of reconciliation and social transformation according to Fanie du Toit (2003). Toenadering entails bilateral or multilateral discussions, though it goes beyond involving diverse stakeholders from geographically and ideologically separated groups, with the main focus on the power of civil society to drive change. Reaching this stage entails, as one of the steps of social reconciliation, intra-community dialogue with the participation of various stakeholders. Intra-community dialogues retain three principal goals: 1) "preventing the complexity of ever-growing numbers of factions and splinter groups within communities"; 2) "helping to prepare communities for a process where their social identities, shaped by years of conflict, isolation and oppression, may be challenged"; and 3) "empowering marginalized communities to find a stronger communal voice" (du Toit, 2003, pp. 153–154). In addition, this process of intra-community dialogue helps create safe spaces for expressing and dealing with the residual anger, mistrust, and hurt, debating courses of action, and the inclusion of all players and stakeholders (du Toit 2003, pp. 153–154).

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Virtual Exchange for Reconciliation – Palestine

The active role of Palestinian civil society in politics has been receding since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. The creation of a new body of authority has shifted away many of the previous political roles played by the societal elites and tribal heads of Palestine, roles held during the Ottoman period, during the British Mandate and the Israeli occupation, roles now held by the new authority (Pappé 2010, pp. 11–21). This society has been further divided geographically, socially, and politically by the West Bank and Gaza Strip division and the different political movements acting as parties. These include the two dominant parties/movements (Fatah and Hamas), many fringe parties and groups, Arab Israelis – or as they are often called "Arab 48" (Arab citizens of the state of Israel) – and Palestinians in the diaspora.

This society has been through many shocks that have further entrenched the gaps and have created fanatic supporters of the two dominant parties Fatah and Hamas. The feeble relations among the society were ruptured in the 2006 elections, continued to show areas of disagreement, were evident in the worsened circumstances preceding the proposed elections in May 2021, and fully damaged with the postponement of the elections until further notice. Regardless of the local, national and international attempts at reconciliation over the past 17 years, starting with the 2006 Document of the Prisoners agreement to the reconciliation attempts in Cairo to prepare for 2021 elections, reconciliation has not taken place on the ground. On the contrary, reconciliation among the parties' leaders undermined the effects and power of civil society to ignite the spark of the aspired change, of a perpetual internal calmness and serenity.

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), the Palestinian population for 2020 in Palestine is circa 5 million: 3 million in the West Bank and 2 million in Gaza (PCBS 2021). In addition, in 2019, the registered Palestinian refugees totalled circa 5.6 million (PCBS 2020). Those numbers exclude most of the unregistered refugees, refugees who left the country after the 1967 war, and about 1.6 million of the so-called Arab 48 (PCBS 2020).[24] The

24 For a better understanding of this division of registered and unregistered refugees I refer to the definition of UNRWA of Palestinian refugees as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine from 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict;" who are registered by UNHCR and UNRWA mandates; or who are also residing in one of the 58 recognized refugee camps by UNRWA in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Ten new recognized camps were added after the

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geographical distance, the impediment to movement, and the lack of dialogue among those sections of Palestinian society urge the need to find alternative approaches and tools for starting dialogue and reconciliation among the wider society using ICT. VE can certainly be one of these.

In collaboration with higher education institutions, such as but not limited to, Hebron University, Bethlehem University, the Islamic University of Gaza, Al Azhar University, Al Najah University, and Birzeit University, civil society organizations and the Sharing Perspectives Foundation, I am engaging at present in testing VE towards social reconciliation. In this project, Palestinian youth (18–30 years old) across the spectrum are invited to explore bottom-up social reconciliation.[25] The participants come together in cycles taking place over 9–10 weeks, where they meet weekly in facilitated sessions to discuss and brainstorm challenging topics (e.g. identity, inclusion/exclusion, citizenship, political and social participation, democracy) which they would not otherwise discuss in such diverse groups. Thus, they learn to acknowledge differences while also realizing their many similarities, resolve and transform conflicts, challenge their biases and stereotypes about the 'other'[26], develop empathy, and collaborate in conceiving and implementing together social initiatives.

The outcomes of each cycle inform subsequent cycles. Weekly reflections on materials and discussions in pre– and post-reflections are promptly analyzed to extract lessons for designing or updating the next cycle/s. The final projects initiated by participants aim at further supporting subsequent project steps and contribute to long-term reconciliation efforts.

1967 war for the new wave of Palestinian refugees (https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees).

These refugees do not include internally displaced Palestinians residing in cities, villages, and around the refugee camps (https://www.unrwa.org/palestine-refugees).

Likewise, the term Arab 48 (Arab citizens of the state of Israel) refers to Palestinians who stayed inside the borders of the newly created state of Israel. They were internally displaced but remained inside the new borders. (Pappé 2011, p. 37)

25 Social reconciliation is a special type of reconciliation which focus on the relationship among individuals in a community. By using the term bottom-up social reconciliation, I refer to the Toenadering with a twist, where community leaders' role will be minimal at the pilot stage and the focus will be mainly on individuals.

26 The other in this context can entail different political affiliations, residences, economic situations, and/or might belong to another religion; although religion plays a minor role in the Palestinian Civil Society division, it is still relevant for a future social contract.

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As this project retains roots in a Community-Based Participatory Approach (CBPA)[27], it entails actively engaging lecturers, researchers, and actors from civil society organizations in identifying the topics to be discussed in the VE and in preparing the weekly material which will activate the youth in their community.

10. Conclusions

In this chapter, Virtual Exchange has been presented as a multifaceted concept, an approach, and a practice, offering a wide array of benefits. VE provides valuable opportunities for interactive learning, networking and skills development. Various formats of VE have been explored, with a particular emphasis on iOOCs offered by SPF. This examination has shed light on effective strategies to offer young people who are geographically separated, a genuine intercultural experience. Hereby this chapter has tackled the decisive role of facilitation for ensuring the aspired outcomes of the VE: Trained facilitators are essential to support dialogic discussions on contested topics and fruitful collaboration and to promote the engagement of the participants in their community. Examining the integration of VE into formal education and featuring examples from various universities that have seamlessly incorporated it into their academic curricula, this chapter underscores how VE has paved the way for broader adoption and the exploration of its untapped potential.

The showcased project being implemented in Palestine for social reconciliation stands as a promising milestone for a wider application of Virtual Exchange as a powerful tool for peace education and reconciliation processes. Through VE, participants engage in online dialogue, immersing themselves in a culture that encourages openness towards 'the other' – and indeed, any 'other'– while actively seeking a change in perspective. VE programs have a transformative impact on the participants themselves and through them on their wider community. The attitudes and skills gained through these programs unlock doors to lifewide learning, influencing and reshaping their everyday lives.

27 CBPA is an approach "in which stakeholders or community members become active participants in many phases of the research—helping to determine the problem, assisting in the design of the research questions, collaborating in data collection and analysis, and serving to disseminate the results" (Creswell, 2014, p. 17).

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Digital Competences in the Educational Sphere
A Case Study From Italy

Tanja Schroot, Giulia Maria Cavaletto and Roberta Ricucci

Abstract *Digital skills are one of the most contested key competences in the educational sphere. On the one hand, they have become essential to guarantee standards of educational quality and progress, on the other hand they tend to further hamper educational inequalities among the contemporary highly-diversified student population.*
This paper ties into these premises with a case study located in Turin, Italy based on 19 teachers and educators from all school levels (primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education) to highlight the transformation of needs and challenges related to the different phases of the life cycle of students.
Three main issues were investigated from a comparative perspective among the study participants: (1) the coherence of their knowledge regarding opportunities and the challenges of digitalization; (2) their skills to implement digital instruments in their working context; and (3) their attitude towards the transfer of potential benefits that enhance learning outcomes through digital instruments.
Findings suggest that high-quality and effective staff formation represents one of the most critical issues when talking about digitality in the educational sphere. A chronic lack of time for training, the ongoing work in emergency conditions, the heterogenous institutional endowment with technical devices (PCs, digital infrastructure, etc.), and the suspicion towards the benefits of digitality in the classroom are some of the major barriers to the forwarding of digital competences as a set of skills, knowledge and attitudes within the educational context.

Keywords *Digital Gap; Teacher Training; Peer-to-peer Education; Cooperative Learning; Lifelong Learning Competencies*

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1. Literature Review, Scientific Debate and Public Policy

The issue of digital competence is of growing interest for public policy as their possession confers very useful qualities and characteristics, both individually and collectively, and thus qualifies as one of the new possible declinations of the broader theme of inequalities. The European Recommendation of 23 May 2018 on lifelong learning introduced digital competence as a basic skill that European citizens should be equipped with. The very recent DigComp 2.2 European framework (which inherits and incorporates the previous DigComps from 2013 onwards) has taken this approach further and recalls the need for educational policies to train people how to exercise active citizenship, both in a traditional and a digital sense. DigComp 2.2 also revises the concept of digital competence in five areas: literacy, communication and cooperation, digital content creation, security, and problem solving.

The scientific community and European policies share the meaning of digital competences as a universe of technological skills (Save the Children, 2021), made up of a hard aspect (digital hard skills) and a soft aspect (digital soft skills), that range accordingly from practical skills (such as using a computer, accessing and using a connection, mastering the various devices) to relational and character skills. The latter allows an effective, aware and responsible use of digital tools, and accordingly involves all areas in which these skills can be deployed: digital identity, digital use, digital safety, digital security, digital emotional intelligence, digital communication, digital literacy, and digital rights. What has inspired European directives, recommendations and guidelines over the last twenty years has been the idea that educational credentials are at the heart of a process of cultural construction of the European space, and that lifelong learning, based on knowledge and competences, is the only effective tool for active citizenship, greater inclusiveness, and improved employability.[1]

Moving now towards a reflection upon social practices, despite the immersive condition present in the technologies that pervade the biographies of adolescents, even the generation of digital natives is in reality neither as technologically aware as one would expect, nor are they subject to specific training

1 See the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning; the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching; and the Council Recommendation from 28 June 2011 on policies to reduce early school leaving.

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in formal, informal and non-formal educational contexts. In fact, we can witness scientific awareness of the difficulties that digital natives encounter in the processes of identity definition, socialization (Pellai, 2018) and in the development of socio-emotional and character skills (Maccarini, 2022). In this regard, the 'spoon and tablet' metaphor has been used (Prensky, 2001) to indicate a socialization process in which growth spurts are measured both through the use of common objects (the spoon) and through the mastery of technologies of information and communication with the related devices. What is important to point out is the fact that the condition of digital natives neither cancels any possible digital divide, nor does it automatically render the individuals themselves necessarily digitally competent.

There is extensive evidence that inequalities in the use of technologies are linked to birth cohort, social and ethnic origin, and gender (Hargittai, 2002, 2004; Di Maggio et al., 2004; Pirone et al., 2008; Ala-Mutka, 2011; Lythreatis, 2022), but inequalities in the development of digital competences also exist among those who were born in a society steeped in technology – digital natives. For these reasons, we no longer speak only of a digital divide but of digital inequalities in a broader sense (Di Maggio et al., 2004; van Dick, 2005; Argentin et al., 2013). Digital competences retain an impact on educational processes, training and learning and are, therefore, in continuous exchange with other key competences. Their acquisition, development, reinforcement, and updating also constitute an effective tool to counteract digital educational poverty (Pasta & Rivoltella, 2022; Marangi et al., 2023; Gui, 2009), to be understood not only as the availability of devices and access to the net, but as the possession of new literacies necessary in the post-medial society. In a more specific focus, digital is one of the most contested key competences in the educational sphere (Green, 2014). However, the very concept of competence requires elucidation. The competence set on which the eight key competences indicated by the European Union are built consist of three elements: knowledge, skills, and attitudes.[2] Whereas *knowledge* refers to the set of concepts, facts, ideas, and theories that are already established and shared and which support learning and understanding processes, *skills* points to those competences necessary to achieve results using previous knowledge. Finally, the competence *attitude* translates into dispositions and beliefs to act and react to ideas in interactions with other social actors and in different situations.

2 See more at: https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/improving-quality/key-competences.

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The relevance of digital competences has been pronounced in different areas. On the one hand, they have become essential to guarantee standards of educational quality and progress as specified in the 2021–2027 Digital Education Action Plan at European level and in the National Plan for Digital Schools for the Italian context. Moreover, they are crucial skills in the labour market. Indeed, according to the World Economic Forum's report "The Future of Jobs 2020", nine out of ten jobs in 2030 will require advanced digital skills, but 44 % of the European population aged 16–74 have low digital skills and 19 % have none (World Economic Forum, 2020). The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI, 2022) shows that four out of ten adults lack basic digital skills. Furthermore, according to the same source, girls/women are little represented in tech-related professions and studies, with only one in six ICT specialists and one in three science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) graduates being women. Over 70 % of businesses have staff with inadequate digital skills.

The discussion on how to bridge the digital divide and enrich the skills portfolio of future workers obviously involves the fields of education (mainly compulsory) and vocational training courses (Kluzer et al., 2020; Barnes et al., 2017). In fact, the key role of learning digital skills during compulsory schooling has been emphasized in many quarters, resulting in the revision of teaching programmes and the updating of the teaching profession itself (Instefjord & Munthe, 2016; CECE, 2017).

In this framework it becomes important to clarify the relevance of the 'digital' issue in relation to ascribed and acquired variables. The topic is in fact relevant for public policy in general (and for educational ones in particular) as the digital gap constitutes one of the most pressing contemporary challenges: A gap related to birth location, gender, employment status, and social class (Hippe & Jakubowski, 2022; Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023).

Each of these elements is the subject of specific policies, highlighting broad, diverse investment in the development, updating and enhancement of the digital skills of all citizens (Ferrari et al. 2013; OECD, 2016).

The reason, however, that leads one to dwell in particular on digital natives stems from the fact that, in spite of their immersive condition in Internet technologies which characterizes their biographies, they are often not very aware of the risks and potential of technology: They possess a low level of critical thinking regarding sources and content conveyed by new media, and have a low awareness of ethical implications related to the use of social media and the Internet in general (Gkioulos et al., 2017; Fabbri, 2020). Furthermore, digital natives encounter difficulties in the processes of identity definition, social-

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ization (Pellai, 2018), and the development of socio-emotional and character competences (Maccarini, 2022).

That schools are directly involved in this social transition (towards the pervasiveness of technologies in education, in society, in services, in welfare, and at work) and are faced with new educational, curricular, and relational challenges is beyond doubt. School is the place where learning, mostly in a certified manner, comes to fruition, both of cognitive curricular skills (defined by teaching programmes and certified by credentials and marks) and of normative relational skills (deriving from secondary and normative socialization), and finally in relation to social and emotional skills.

Another crucial point, at the centre of national and European public policies, concerns the school-to-work transition. In society 4.0, the nexus between training and work is, even more than in the previous information society (Castells, 1996), a central element to prevent inequalities from increasing and to succeed in equipping young people with the knowledge and skills needed for the labour market (Brunello & Wruuck, 2019). Schools are accordingly at the centre of attention (and severely judged) when it comes to the training of young people, rendering them potentially attractive to businesses, service agencies, and international/national/local productive firms. But they are also guilty of failing to prepare their teachers to face the latest knowledge challenges, remaining anchored in outdated educational methods (Argentin et al., 2013; Ranieri, 2022; Cortoni, 2021). And this is particularly relevant in the Italian context (Esposito & Scicchitano, 2022). Indeed, as Unioncamere (Italian Union of Chambers of Commerce) data (2020–2025 scenario) shows for Italy, there has been an increase in the demand for digital, STEM, and innovation 4.0 skills, which employers require with an e-skill mix (the possession to a high degree of at least two e-skills), with an estimate of between 886,000 and 924,000 staff units. Regarding digital skills, both existing and new emerging professions will be in demand, such as those of data scientist, big data analyst, cloud computing expert, cyber security expert, business intelligence analyst, and artificial intelligence systems engineer.

This chapter ties into this overall premise with an Italian case study to highlight the transformation of needs and challenges related to the different phases of the life cycle of students, from primary school to upper-secondary school, in a period characterized by the post-Covid aftermath and highly heterogeneous educational contexts. These feature a high number of students regardless of their socio-cultural, religious, ethnic, and economic backgrounds who have had a heterogeneous range of teachers and educators with regard to age,

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gender, experience, training and, therefore, very differentiated didactic and methodological traditions and attitudes towards learning. This first section has just set the contextual scene; in the following chapters we will present the case study (section two) and the findings (section three) that will be concluded with a summary and suggestions for further analysis.

2. The Case Study

The research was conducted within the framework of the Horizon 2020 project named KIDS4ALLL (Key Inclusive Development Strategies for LifeLong Learning) which aims to foster the development and implementation of the eight lifelong learning key competences in fifteen participating partner institutions from eleven EU and non-EU national contexts. The basic assumption of the project is that every individual should have access throughout their life to high-quality, inclusive education, as well as to qualification and retraining opportunities[3] that contribute to the building of key competences. This objective concerns all levels of education and training, but particularly involves certain categories of learners, who are more fragile and exposed to skills deficits, obsolescence or inadequacy. These categories include both students with a migratory background[4] and those with individual and family fragility factors (mainly linked to the possession of different capitals: social, cultural, human), from which the phenomena of early school leaving, poverty and social exclusion, and NEET (i.e. Not in Education, Employment or Training) situations may result (di Padova & Nerli Bellati, 2018).

The research for this contribution is operationally based on a model called inside a KIDS4ALLL project 'buddy collaboration', which provides for work in pairs or small groups (in a peer-to-peer manner) within formal, non-formal,

3 The Italian educational system distinguishes between "education, training and instruction" applied to compulsory (primary, lower and upper secondary school) and post-diploma study courses; it also provides for "qualification" to refer specifically to a process aimed at aligning future workers' knowledge and skills with the needs and demands of the labour market; to these are added specific professional updates and training modules.

4 This expression tries to overcome the contested labels of second-generations, see the European Migration Network Glossary: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/person-migratory-background_en.

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and informal contexts aiming at knowledge and skills acquisition through apprehension and creative re-elaboration of learning contents related to the eight Life Long Learning (LLL) key competencies.[5] This study tested a method inspired by, but going beyond, the peer-to-peer orientation: It is a 'buddy method' in which pairs of students learn in an innovative way, using digital resources and a platform created ad hoc, the definitions and content related to one of the competencies indicated by LLL. They also acquire and revise these competences in a creative and original way, and then produce their own content and resources (textual, visual, audiovisual, etc.), which they pass on to other pairs of younger peers in a peer-4-peer process, with a pair of less experienced peers.

Focus groups and interviews were used to obtain participants' opinions of this method and obtain some useful information regarding educational policies.

In this framework, we developed a specific case study, located in the city of Turin. The data was retrieved from February to June 2021 from a total of 19 study participants (nine teachers, six educators, four transversal stakeholders) who were interviewed online in six focus groups (FG) and two interviews (I) (see Table 1).

Our research questions were formulated as follows:

a) Does the use of digital resources (the innovation by technologies at schools) promote the development of students' competencies in the in-school and out-of-school contexts?
b) Can the adoption of an innovative teaching-learning method that combines digital skills, collaborative skills, and creativity, applied to the development of specific lifelong learning skills, improve overall classroom outcomes and indirectly promote other student skills, both curricular and extracurricular?
c) Are teachers adequately trained in digital literacies so that they can bring truly innovative elements to their professional practice?

The participants of the focus groups were recruited through reasoned choice sampling that guaranteed the heterogeneity of perspectives starting from dif-

5 The KIDS4AIII project foresees that teachers and students use a platform with online resources for LLL competences, organized in learning units, and a synthetic manual presenting the same approach in paper and reduced form.

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ferent education cycles (primary, lower and upper secondary), different territorial locations (urban, peri-urban, extra-urban) and finally diversified situations of hardship and fragility as an ethnic and social mix (Besozzi & Colombo, 2020).

The context in which the research was carried out offers an overview of various Italian metropolitan realities, in which compulsory schooling is characterized by investment in terms of cutting-edge projects and initiatives, even in the field of digital skills (Demartini et al., 2020). Furthermore, the city of Turin is recognized nationwide for its inter-institutional collaboration in promoting educational activities, as well as for a significant vitality and participation of civil society organizations (Davico & Staricco, 2019, 2020; Ricucci, 2020). For these reasons it can be used as a case study, with transferable elements to other contexts.

Table 1: Study Participants by Learning Context

Method	Learning context School level		Study participants	Notes
FG1	**FORMAL**	**Primary school**	4 teachers	From 4 primary schools in Turin city
(FG2)	**FORMAL**	**Upper secondary school**	3 teachers	From 3 different schools in Turin, 2 of which are vocational schools
(FG3)	**FORMAL**	**Lower secondary school**	2 teachers (former principals)	From different lower secondary schools in Turin
(FG4)	**NON-FORMAL**	**Association**	6 trained volunteers working with children enrolled in primary schools and pre-adolescents aged 11–14, and 1 educator	Turin urban associations

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Method	Learning context School level		Study participants	Notes
(FG5)	NON-FORMAL	Parish club	3 Educators	All educators experienced Covid-related distance learning with students of different age groups
I1	NON-FORMAL	Association	1 Coordinator	1 policymaker
I2	NON-FORMAL	Association	1 Coordinator	1 policymaker
(FG6)	TRANSVERSAL	Psychologists	2 Psychologists	Both working with migrant children; thorough experience w/peer projects

The study sample has been composed and selected in accordance with several critical elements that emerged:

1. Teachers/educators working with students of a migratory background. The objective was to involve practitioners from formal and non/informal learning contexts as well as experts working transversally on issues that tackle the project contents. In accordance with the scope of the project, the investigation involved predominantly (but not exclusively) teachers and educators working and retaining long-standing experience in highly diversified formal and non-formal contexts (schools and associations) with an increased rate of students of a migratory background.
2. Formal context: school levels. The aim was to include all school levels (primary school, lower secondary education, upper secondary education) in order to cover all of the compulsory educational levels (in academic and scientific debates named as ISCED groups) which the project addresses. Accordingly, we set up three focus groups for each school level (primary, lower secondary and upper secondary), choosing, however, for upper sec-

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ondary education, teachers from technical and vocational schools[6], as research in the local and national Italian context confirms that these school tracks or paths are preferably chosen and frequented by a high number of students with a migratory background, compared to the high school/grammar school tracks (Palmas, 2002; Cavaletto et al., 2015; Ricucci & Premazzi, 2020). The comparison with teachers and educators working with students of different ages, as it has been previously mentioned, had the purpose of highlighting the transformation of needs, critical aspects and challenges related to the different phases of the life cycle of students.

3. Non-formal context: associations. Also, socio-cultural indicators were considered for the selection of experts from non-formal contexts. Therefore, focus groups and interviews were conducted with highly significant institutions in the local Turin context that put the education of young people at the centre of their concern.

The collected data has been analyzed according to a grounded theory approach: Qualitative data software analysis has not been used due to the number of interviews and focus groups.

3. Findings

The results that emerged from this small-scale study provide an overview of the needs, methods and lacunae of digital skills and digitalization exemplified by the Italian educational context. Indeed, the study sample provided corresponding considerations and suggestions that have been categorized into three thematic areas, according to the research questions specified above. Below are the results for each of these points, highlighting suggestions for a further debate in the field and ideas regarding educational policies.

6 The Italian school system has three levels of education: primary schools (from 6 to 10 years), lower-secondary school (from 11 to 13 years) and upper-secondary school (from 14 to 19 years). The latter is divided into different types of pathways: high schools/grammar schools, vocational schools, and technical schools, with different curricular programmes, different users, and different social reputations.

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Innovation by Technologies: The Challenge of a LLL Competencies Platform

The data collection highlighted several relevant issues. The first concerns the problem of the differences in school equipment, regarding PCs, tablets, connections, and digital infrastructure. The activities carried out in KIDS4alll included the use of digital resources (both the platform and the learning units and, more generally, access to online resources, especially with regard to the Peer-4-Peer phase). It was maintained that technology and thus digital means had to be promoted as instruments preceded and supported by a well-thought-out pedagogic strategy, treading the path of so-called pedagogy 2.0, which interweaves physical and virtual environments and is based on participation and sharing (Persico & Midoro, 2013; Riva, 2019), and also on adequate technological equipment. This first element provides a double clue: on the one hand, the technical equipment of schools is not always sufficient for the implementation of innovative pedagogical and didactic measures; on the other hand, its availability does not automatically equate to the ability to use it (an aspect that will be examined in more detail in section 3.3).

Furthermore, the educational needs of pupils vary by age and in relation to the school they attend. Digital literacy, indeed, is the result of a cumulative and critical process, realized both through the school levels and according to the abilities of the students in relation to their age. Collected data show that primary schools are the most difficult level of education for the introduction and adoption of technologies. The "It's never too early" approach (Cederna, 2017, p.25 ff.) clashes with the priority given to educational, emotional, and relational needs: In primary school the educational action focuses on behavioural, emotional, and social aspects, rather than on the use of devices and technologies. Focus group interviews presented us with the idea that primary school teachers are, furthermore, the most resistant in relation to the use of technologies, and possess fewer skills in this regard, and precisely for the aforementioned reasons: In this educational cycle the Italian system gives priority to the more relational and educational aspects. The result is also confirmed by stakeholders. This aspect, linked to the students' young age, is independent of the age of the teachers (in fact our sample had teachers of different cohorts), however united they may be by the fact that they are not digital natives. The lack of an early education process towards technologies (both at home and at school) among teachers produces a delay in learning, improving skills and knowledge, which are key in the current digital times.

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In the opinion of interviewees, participation and the use of digital technology grows in lower secondary school and reaches the maximum level in upper secondary school; here, however, there is a marked difference between teachers of humanities (with a low level of socialization towards new technologies and little inclined to train themselves in them) and those in the STEM fields who are more used to platforms and ICT tools as an integral part of the curriculum and of teaching methodologies. The use of platforms is also conditioned by the age of the pupils and their ability to use them independently, without teachers or with low supervision by teachers. Indeed, this independent use is accentuated with increasing age. In the primary cycle, however, the presence of adults and in particular a strong alliance and cooperation between school and family, giving continuity and effectiveness to educational interventions, are essential. But in disadvantaged contexts, the digital skills of families, as well as the supply of devices, are scarce or absent.

Innovation in a Teaching/Learning Methodology for LLL Competencies

In general, teaching and learning of curricular disciplines in all cycles of Italian school occur primarily in face-to-face or, at most, laboratory settings; non-curricular skills (such as social and emotional skills, interpersonal skills, soft skills, etc.[7]) are not the subject of explicit teaching-learning programs in the Italian school system. In any case, even in contexts where teachers use collaborative methods, the peer-to-peer approach and cooperative learning[8] are never really extensively used (Shekhar & Shailendra, 2021; WEF, 2019). The opinion of the respondents is unanimous on this point: Although the use of peer-to-peer and cooperative learning is limited, they are considered necessary for innovation in teaching-learning processes. The opinions of all participants agreed that this approach can be an innovative and dispensable method for all students of all

7 More details on the differences between skills at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-studies_23078731?page=2

8 Cooperative learning has been described as "learning together" (Johnson & Johnson, 1975) and "education of young people by young people" (Shiner, 1999). Both definitions generally refer to a series of instructional activities that recognize children and adolescents as social actors who interact with adults in a mutually constitutive way. Students are thus rendered protagonists in the educational scenario that looks back on traditional teaching methods, which considered them as mere receptors of the educational action.

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ages and backgrounds, but is especially effective with students who have experienced inclusion difficulties, disadvantaged conditions, and/or fragmented school biographies (Fabiano, 2020; Rivoltella, 2015).

The use of the Buddy Method is positively evaluated by all experts, both for the development of digital literacy and awareness and for the expression of other competencies, especially cooperative skills. Overall, teachers, volunteers and educators are aware of the growing complexity of the contexts in which they operate. Most of their skills were built in the field through the 'learning-by-doing' method. But there was a lack of training and updating due to the work overload of educational staff. This is mainly due to the elaboration and implementation of strategies to carve out the many benefits of learning in multi-ethnic classes and related challenges to teach within highly heterogeneous educational contexts. Both require constant efforts on diverse levels: From an administrative and professional point of view, and thus related to the successful implementation of the curriculum, and the transmission and cultivation of knowledge. On the other hand, also with regard to the rather relational and affective aspect: For keeping in dialogue with both students and families. However, starting from a common appreciation of the method, the teachers also add a critical note: It is definitely necessary to introduce and implement innovative methods such as the Buddy Method, but without neglecting traditional methods that were considered by the interviewees to be essential and fundamental to the implementation of the programme planned for each class and type of school (Cohen, 1988).

This divide between teachers (who work inside schools) and other educational practitioners (who work inside and outside schools) points to a particular position of the teaching profession, firmly anchored in a vision that only superficially does not reject innovation, but in reality, remains wedded to the frontal mode of teaching and the formal execution of ministerial programmes. This element applies to teachers at all levels of education, although it is particularly emphasized by those teaching at the lower and upper secondary levels, but to a much lesser extent at the elementary level, where the age of the students requires a greater inclination to innovate and discover less conventional methods. The reason for this resistance on the part of some teachers can be attributed to the difficulty of using methods and tools other than the more usual ones, resulting in a kind of bureaucratic ritualism in the performance of their teaching duties. In order to encourage experimentation, teachers should be continuously trained in less conventional pedagogical experiences and practices, as will be discussed in more detail below. Moreover, and this is another

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element that emerged from focus groups, those of the teaching staff who are most resistant to change are also those who display a higher degree of insecurity in their role – due to a climate of widespread distrust of their work on the part of families, civil society, and the media – and fear losing control over groups of students.

Innovation for Teachers and Educators' Training

Regarding the digital competencies of teachers and others working in education, focus groups and interviews underlined the deficit of competence and the sense of efficacy among teachers and some educators became clear: They are technically inexperienced and possess a low know-how in using platforms, additionally experience a chronic lack of time for training, often working in emergency conditions. This element is particularly noticeable among the older cohorts of educators and teachers, who incidentally make up the majority of staff in Italian schools and associations. The provision of continuous training for teachers, volunteers and educators was considered of the utmost importance by all interviewees. The previous experience of teachers with digital learning tools is minimal in primary schools and rather better in lower and upper secondary schools; educators often have no experience in this regard. Even among digitally experienced staff, the digital competence in actual usage varied greatly. The disciplinary field, in the opinion of interviewees, is decisive, especially in upper secondary schools, where the digital application is almost exclusively in the hands of the teachers of scientific and technical subjects. The data confirms the need for professional updates and specific interventions to bridge the digital divide; to this we could also add the need for a structural adjustment within the schools, in terms of technological equipment (Unesco 2023).

Psychologists interviewed refer to the growing demand among teachers for digital skills and emphasize the need to increase the awareness of how best to use digital tools, not only among students, but also among teachers and educators. Following this aspect, all of the interviewees unanimously confirmed the need to use both the peer-to-peer and peer-4-peer methods even in teaching staff training: A cooperative approach could act positively to bridge the digital divide among generations, with experienced teachers supporting those who are less digitally literate or do not understand the implications of digitality for education. This would also include children helping teachers to improve their digital skills, as happened during the first pandemic. Teachers and educators

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also reported that online learning can offer more opportunities for one-to-one or few-to-one student-teacher relationships, increasing intimacy and personalization. Finally, digitization offers schools the opportunity to create new networks by connecting with other schools or institutions in different parts of the world; it is an opportunity to open up and get to know new cultures and people.

4. Conclusion

The digitization of schools and other educational contexts involves and challenges various actors and contexts. Teachers, educators, and students are all recipients and initiators of digitization interventions, in the name of innovation in schools, educational methods, and learning content. However, not all teachers, educators, and students travel this path at the same speed: There are variables, both at individual and context level, that impact significantly.

Furthermore, individual skills in technology, acquired either through specific training courses or from practice are very different and difficult to standardize and homogenize for all teachers at all schools' level; teachers' training on this is linked to individual initiative, greater or lesser proximity of the subject area with new technologies and cohort effects. As far as students are concerned, the paradox of digital natives has been highlighted and confirmed by this study: Skilled in the use of social networks and instant messaging but unfamiliar with digital resources for educational purposes and for the expansion of knowledge, digital natives are often inadequately equipped in relation to critical skills for a responsible and conscious use of technology.

Other issues must be added relating to the technological resources available to individual schools or, more generally, to learning contexts. A crucial issue deals with the social positioning of students and their families, with cultural and economic resources that may facilitate or, conversely, hinder the development of digital competence; and finally we have to mention – as emerged in our study – the characteristics of teaching staff as a whole, equipped differently in digital technology but also capable of planning interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary educational interventions in which technologies constitute a shared resource.

Findings suggest that high-quality and effective staff training represents, on the one hand, one of the most critical issues when talking about digitality in the educational sphere and, on the other, the most urgent and useful topic to be focussed on and in which investment remains necessary. A chronic lack of

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time for training, ongoing work in emergency conditions, heterogenous institutional endowment with technical devices (PCs, digital infrastructure, etc.), and doubts regarding the benefits of digitality in the classroom are some of the major barriers to improving digital competences as a set of skills, knowledge, and attitudes within the educational context. In this sense, the funds deriving e.g. from the EU programme "Next Generation" offer the opportunity to better equip schools, organize and implement training and refresher courses for teachers, and carry out interventions in disadvantaged areas to support socio-economically vulnerable individuals, adults and minors (Zancajo et al., 2022). In the future, therefore, it will be interesting to evaluate the outcomes and by-products. Likewise, a comparative study within the Italian context and among similar city contexts may offer useful indications in terms of a policy-transferability and best-practices sharing perspective.

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Appendix

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